To See the Midnight Sun

Free Will, Liberation, and Responsibility in *The Lady from the Sea*'s Subplot

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Every new work has had as its purpose for me that of serving as a process of spiritual emancipation and purification; for no man ever stands quite without some responsibility and some complicity in the society to which he belongs. That was why I once wrote the following lines in a copy of one of my books as a dedication:

To *live* is to war with trolls
in the vaults of the heart and the brain.
To *write*: that is to sit
in judgement over one's self.

Henrik Ibsen, A letter to Ludwig Passarge, 16 June 1880

[H]ver ny digtning har for mig selv havt det øjemed at tjene som en åndelig frigørelses- og renselses-proses; thi man står aldrig ganske uden medansvarlighed og medskyldighed i det samfund man tilhører. Derfor skrev jeg engang som tilegnelsesdigt foran i et exemplar af en af mine bøger følgende linjer:

«At leve er krig med trolde
i hjertets og hjernens hvælv;
At digte – det er at holde
dommedag over sig selv.»

Henrik Ibsens brev til Ludwig Passarge, München, den 16. Juni 1880

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Lady from the Sea as a text, like its main protagonist, Ellida, encapsulates many noteworthy and peculiar characteristics in Ibsen's contemporary play cycle. It has not been seen as one of his most popular plays, nor is it considered one of the best. The initial reception (and some of the later criticism) deemed it strange and obscure. Brian Johnston, for instance, pointed out that this work *seems* an oddity among Ibsen's realist plays (1989, 194), whereas Knut Hamsun thought his fellow countryman created "højere Vanvid" (as quoted in Hemmer 2003, 374). Its neat symbolism and undecipherable mysticism have often been denounced, such as in the case of Kristofer Randers's review for the Swedish press (in Meyer 1971, 602), whereas C. D. af Wirsten anguished in front of the play's peculiarity: "Come back, old Shakespeare, with your wholesome humanity, and dispel these eccentricities" (ibid.). Johan Irgens-Hansen is another in the line of critics who complained about its subject matter bordering on mysticism; yet, in spite of it, he writes that "Ibsen had proved himself again a 'realist' and even a 'naturalist'" (as quoted in Koht 1971, 388). According to Meyer's inquiry, Edvard Brandes and the Swede J. A. Runström were the only critics who gave positive reviews of the play upon its release (1971, 602). For M.S. Barranger, who agrees with many of the above mentioned judgments, *The Lady from the Sea* represents a "preparatory effort" to the new direction Ibsen took in his last plays (1978, 393), an opinion that I share. Additionally, the happy end, described as unconvincing and weak, contributed to critics' reluctance to wholeheartedly embrace this play; as Fjelde put it, one has the feeling that *The Lady From the Sea* is "somehow not *echt* Ibsen" (1978, 379).

Bjørn Hemmer notes other of its deficiencies, namely the obvious symbolism and the ending's didacticism: «Likevel har dramaet også trekk som gjør det til et av Ibsens mest tydelige verk. Det er stedvis nærmest overtydelig i sin symbolikk. Og i sin avslutning kan det virke påtrengende didaktisk...» (2003, 374). I must agree with this criticism of the didactic tones of its ending, which I disliked as well; nonetheless, I consider this text, like many of Ibsen's works, far from simple and obvious. In fact, I can forcefully argue that one may be quite unaware of how detailed and multileveled Ibsen's plays are until the analysis is approached. The text's complexity is one of the main reasons why my thesis is focused primarily on the subplot and not on the entire play.[1]

[1] There have been, however, (female) commentators who have found this play intriguing and have paid significant attention to its themes. See, for instance, Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006); Ellen Rees, "By the Open Sea: Ibsen's *Fruen fra havet* and Fosse's *Nokon kjem til å komme,*" *Ibsen* Studies 11, no.2 (2011): 192-222, and "Melodramatic Traces And Places In *The Lady From The Sea*," *Ibsen Studies* 13,

The Lady from the Sea has been regularly associated with *A Doll's House* due to the theme of acceptance and understanding between marital partners. Several commentators have pointed out that Ibsen has demonstrated to the readers and the audiences what he intended by the wonder (*det vidunderlige*) Nora awaited from her husband. That miracle comprises the gender issue – freedom for women in terms of being respected as autonomous beings. More precisely, in the case of *The Lady from the Sea*, this problem regards a woman's right to follow her own free will. The concept of free will in the text prima facie refers to the triangle Ellida, Wangel, and the Stranger; nonetheless, Bolette's story will be the center of the analysis in this thesis. Before proceeding with the overview of the scholarship, an exposition of the main conceptions in the philosophical debate on free will and determinism is in order, accompanied by a short introduction of Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of situation.

1.1 Approaching freedom in a deterministic society

1.1.1 The free will debate

To address the free will problem in a brief summary is an inherently difficult task. Robert Kane in his Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* stresses that we are dealing with what is probably the most extensively discussed of all philosophical problems: "Debates about free will have become so voluminous in the past century, especially in the latter half of it – so much so that it has become difficult to keep up with the latest developments" (2002, 3). There is a strong reason behind such an intense interest on the matter; the high-paced development of the sciences during and after the twentieth century, namely the cognitive and

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no.2 (2013): 79-100; Sandra Saari, "«Hun som ikke selv har noe riktig livskall...»: Women and the Role of the 'Ideal Woman' in Ibsen's Munich Trilogy," *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen* 5 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1985): 24-38, and "Giving Voice: the Emergence of a Female Story in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* (part one)," in *Ibsen at the Centre for Advanced Study*, ed. Vigdis Ystad (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 248-260. Starting with her master thesis, Beret Wicklund is another scholar who has written extensively on some of the issues in this play. See her articles "Ibsens kvener og havfruer: myter, samfunnskritikk og overføring i *Fruen fra havet,*" *Edda* 1, Stort Ibsen-nummer (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997): 99-110; "The Gothic Subtext in the Munich Trilogy as Presenting Female Sexuality," in *Ibsen: The Dark Side*, ed. Stefano Bajma Griga, Gianna De Martino, and Ruth Anne Henderson (Roma**:** Carocci**,** 2005), 127-134; "Gender Relations as Projections in *The Lady from the Sea*," in *The Living Ibsen: Proceedings of the XI International Ibsen Conference*, 2006, Oslo (Oslo: Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo**,** 2007), 415-420; and "Til forsvar for Bolette: ekteskapsdebatten i Ibsens *Fruen fra havet*," *Studia Universitatis* Babeș-*Bolyai Series philologia* 3, Ibsen-nummer (Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, 2006): 79-84. Ellen Hartmann has analyzed this work from psychoanalytical perspective; see, for instance, "The *Lady from the Sea* and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*," *Proceedings of the VII International Ibsen Conference*, 1993, Grimstad (Oslo: Centre for Ibsen Studies**,** 1994**)**, 485-496; "Demonic Aspects in *The Lady from the Sea*," in *Ibsen: The Dark Side*, ed. Stefano Bajma Griga, Gianna De Martino, and Ruth Anne Henderson (Roma**:** Carocci**,** 2005), 29-36. A revised version of her article "*The Lady from the Sea* in a Mythologic(al) and Psychoanalytic Perspective," *Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen* 8 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997): 133-146 has been republished as "*Fruen fra havet* sett i et mytologisk og psykoanalytisk perspektiv," *Impuls: tidsskrift for psykologi* 57, no. 2, (Oslo: Psykologisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo, 2003): 32-39. I shall discuss some of these articles further in my analysis.

neuroscience and the quantum physics,[2] has played its role in this philosophical debate (ibid., 7). In many of the sourcebooks and collections of essays on the topic, especially in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, the editors do not shy away from including contributions that embrace interdisciplinary approaches.[3] Before addressing some of the writings and the authors whose theories I draw upon in this thesis, I will proceed with a short overview of the main positions in the debate.

The so-called incompatibilism is based on two premises: (a) the existence of alternative possibilities (the power and ability to genuinely act or choose otherwise) is the essential prerequisite to act out of free will, and (b) determinism cannot be reconciled (compatible) with the aforementioned alternative possibilities.[4] In accordance with these propositions, the following (incompatibilist) dichotomy arises: on the one hand, the commonly named traditional hard determinism and its ramifications that deny the existence of alternative possibilities, versus the libertarian concept of free will with all of its varieties that reject the influence of any previous conditioning (ibid., 10-11).[5]

Proponents of determinism insist on the impossibility of freedom of choice, with every event being a result of a long chain of causal events. As Kane writes, "determinist or necessitarian threats to free will have taken many historical forms – fatalist, theological, physical or scientific, psychological and logical" (ibid., 6). Yet we find some general traits recurrent in every one of them. In its controversial extremes, determinism holds that the past and the laws of nature determine only one possible future as their inevitable consequence. This argument goes in the direction of excluding (moral) responsibility for the actions the individual performs; a person cannot be held accountable if s/he has previously been

[2] In light of this theory, the position of elementary particles cannot be known, whereas their behavior "can be explained only by probabilistic, not deterministic, laws" (Kane 2002, 7). In that respect, quantum theory represents a far cry from the Newtonian and Laplacean deterministic world whose dominion in the physical sciences in the previous three centuries supported philosophical determinism (ibid.). Kane also points out the obvious paradox that even though determinism "has been in retreat in physical sciences," determinists and compatibilist theories of human behavior have been experiencing flourishing in the twentieth century. Namely, the research findings in neuroscience, biology, psychology, social sciences have helped advance deterministic views: "They have convinced many persons that *more* [my emphasis] of our behavior is determined by causes unknown to us and beyond our control" (ibid., 7-9).

[3] See, for instance, David Hodgson, "Quantum Physics, Consciousness, and Free Will," 85-110; Robert C. Bishop, "Chaos, Indeterminism, and Free Will," 111-124; Henrik Walter, "Neurophilosophy of Free Will," 565-576 and Benjamin Libet "Do We Have Free Will?," 551-564 in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[4] For a thorough presentation of the nuances of these premises and questions, see Kane's *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[5] What I attempt to present in this overview of the conceptions are the traditionally dominant views. Since the scope of this thesis is a textual analysis of a literary work in light of some of these philosophical theories, it is a daunting task to refer to all the perspectives and their specific subtleties. I find it necessary to emphasize that, in many respects, every scholar has his/her own distinctive denomination of his/her position. Some of those positions comprise: hard determinism, hard incompatibilism, compatibilism, soft compatibilism, semicompatibilism, narrow incompatibilism, soft incompatibilism, illusionism, impossibilism, event-causal libertarianism, agent-causal libertarianism, soft libertarianism etc.

conditioned by genes, desires, upbringing and early education, or by the society that shapes her/him in what is agreed to be socially accepted or desirable for that particular context.[6] However, many philosophers find this position highly disputable and "disheartening," since it represents an open menace to the human conception of freedom: "all trends are permanent, character is by and large immutable, and it is unlikely that one will change one's ways, one's fortunes, or one's basic nature in the future" (Dennett and Taylor 2002, 270).

At the opposite pole stand indeterminism and libertarianism, with "the most ambitious conception of free will" (Smilansky 2002, 490), according to which human beings are ultimate originators, initiators and causes of their behavior, actions and choices. This standpoint can be summarized with Carl Ginet's view that at every given moment, each agent has two or more possibilities open to him/her: "Nothing that exists up to that moment stands in the way of my doing next any one of the alternatives" (as quoted in Dennett and Taylor 2002, 258). From my perspective, this may seem as a rather unconvincing position, since what we choose ultimately reflects our previous experiences and encompasses our desires, past events, and our reaction to those occurrences.

As Kane elucidates, one of the emerging problems in deterministic discourses are the individual's "reactive attitudes" toward human behavior that are tightly associated with the belief in free will. Human beings hold other humans responsible for their actions and choices. More precisely, whenever one feels or expresses worship, disappointment, approval, or gratitude, the implication is that the acts for which s/he feels discontented or appreciative can be attributed to the person to whom these feelings are directed, i.e. the person who has committed the acts is responsible for these choices (Kane 2002, 5). Therefore, in previous centuries and in contemporary times, some philosophers attempted to overcome this collision by conflating the arguably opposed notions of determinism and free will in various compatibilist perspectives. The compatibilist concept of free will – or, in James's terms, the "soft determinism" – acknowledges the causal influence on the agent's actions, yet, in spite of the causation, the individual is considered free to choose from many different options. Accordingly, this perspective entitles a person with freedom and responsibility for the actions s/he performs. The traditional (classical) compatibilism (traced back to Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Descartes) addressed freedom of choice in terms of contingency, power, and ability. What is important for the compatibilists is the conditional or hypothetical nature of

[6] It is worth clarifying that these postulates can mostly be traced in what the American philosopher and psychologist William James labeled as "hard determinism". James makes a distinction between what he denominates soft and hard determinism, the former being one that embraces free will as a notion compatible with determinism, and the latter negating the existence of free will.

choice, i.e. the ability to act, if one is willing to do so. To act out of free will entails power to undertake (desired, willed) actions on the assumption that there are no "physical restraints, lack of opportunity, duress or coercion, physical and mental impairment" obstructing the agent's actions (ibid., 12-13). However, these classical compatibilist theories have been also called into question. To respond to those challenges, contemporary adherents to this position propose meticulously elaborated new theories, making compatibilism a vast sea of miscellaneous perspectives and dissimilar views (ibid., 10).[7]

With regards to causation, I consider the distinction between causes and explanations important. In *The Freedom of the Will*, J. R. Lucas accuses determinists of merging the two concepts and holding onto explanations of actions as causes that induce the agent not to be able to do otherwise. Whereas we can assert that every action may have an explanation, as an answer why somebody did what s/he did by giving a reason, reasons are rarely consistent and "one-way". Arguments on both sides, for an intended action and against, can always be found: "From the fact that an action is explicable, it does not follow that it is determined, in the sense in which we are using the word 'determined'" (1970, 52-53).[8]

What I see as a flaw in all of these arguments is that many of them shed (new) light only upon certain aspects, whereas at the same time refusing to make significant efforts to address the aspects which undermine their claims. Even notable names in the history of this philosophical discussion, like that of William James, fail to provide answers to some of the most important issues. In his highly influential essay *The Dilemma of Determinism* (1884), considered a classic in the free will debate, James's main objective is to question determinism, i.e. the "dogma that all things were foredoomed and settled long ago" (1979, 140). Therefore, he seeks to argue that the future is unpredictable and far from being only one

[7] For instance, Harry Frankfurt proposes a hierarchical theory that differentiates between first- and second-order desires. The first-order desires (wills) motivate or move the subject to act. S/he shall discriminate and reflect upon which of those desires shall become second-order (free) volitions (20). Susan Wolf, on the other hand, strongly advocates for "the reason view" that defines freedom and being free in terms of doing the right thing for the right reasons. She stresses the weight of knowledge of what is "the True and the Good" in the process of making a decision (21). Daniel Dennett defends a semi-compatibilistic approach and rejects the premise that it is essential for an agent to have the opportunity to do otherwise, i.e. the principle of alternative possibilities (15). In the essay "Who's Afraid of Determinism? Rethinking Causes and Possibilities," Daniel Dennett and Christopher Taylor emphasize individual effort as carrying significant weight in acting upon our decisions: "Suppose that determinism turns out to be true. Would that in any way undercut our claim that our activity nevertheless played an essential role in this essay's creation? Not in the least, even after we factor in the earlier deeds of our parents and teachers. Without our efforts, it is safe to say that no essay exactly like this (or even closely similar) would have been produced. Hence we are entitled to claim some 'originative value' for our unique accomplishment" (2002, 273).

[8] Lucas illustrates this differentiation giving a simple example: if a person refuses a party invitation because the last party s/he attended was quite boring, that "boringness" may be considered as a reason for refusing the other one, "but it did not necessitate a refusal on [his/her] part"; s/he might have as well decided to sacrifice one night "for the sake of sociability." Although the agent had a reason for the way s/he acted, that action (the refusal) "was not inevitable, ineluctable, necessitated or determined" (1970, 53-54).

possible. He does not clarify where in that unforeseeable future the influence of our previous experience or genetic heredity can find their place. Still, I concur with his delineations of indeterminism and find them accurate:

> Actualities seem to float in a wider sea of possibilities from out of which they are chosen (…). Determinism, on the contrary says they exist *nowhere*, and that necessity on the one hand and the impossibility on the other are the sole categories of the real. Possibilities that fail to get realized are, for determinism, pure illusions: they never were possibilities at all. (ibid., 118)

His judgment resonates in *The Lady from the Sea* to some extent. In accordance with the hard deterministic philosophy, Ellida in no other possible universe could have chosen the Stranger over Wangel, or the sea over life on shore. In a similar fashion, Bolette could not have done otherwise than to leave her home and marry Arnholm, a view I cannot agree with. Nevertheless, to claim that those choices were completely open and free from previous causation or even haphazard, random-chance acts of will (as in libertarian indeterminism), is far from the textual evidence which states the contrary. A serious analysis of both cases cannot underplay the conditioning of nature, society and past experiences. Thus, for the sake of gaining deeper understanding of the main problems in the play, neither hard determinism nor indeterminism/libertarianism prove adequate to be applied categorically and wholesale.[9] One of the main reasons for my rejection of hard determinism lies in the accent placed on the issue of responsibility. The obstructions that afflicted women's actions and life were both external and internal. They affected two areas: the more tangible space of everyday life, with its fixed societal roles; and the more elusive mental conditioning, a consequence of the educational shaping during their upbringing. As a side-effect, accountability is (or should be) automatically discharged. Lucas sees the problem thus:

> There are two reasons why we feel that determinism defeats responsibility. It dissolves the agent's *ownership* of his actions: and it precludes their being really explicable in terms of their *rationale*. If determinism is true, then my actions are no longer really my actions, and they no longer can be regarded as having been done for reasons rather than causes. (1970, 27)

In my analysis I shall not seek to solve a problem that has been the subject of arduous debates across centuries. My approach closely touches upon the compatibilist view on human action and freedom of choice. Nevertheless, I also partly embrace the idea of agents as originators of

[9] In his essay "Do We Have Free Will?," the professor of psychology Benjamin Libet reminds us that determinism as much as indeterminism are unproven theories. If determinism could be valid for the palpable world that surrounds us it is less so for the category of subjective phenomena: "The assumption that a deterministic nature of the physically observable world (to the extent that may be true) can account for subjective conscious functions and event[s], is a speculative *belief*, not a scientifically proven proposition" (2002, 562).

their behavior. I agree in some respects with the suggestion that human beings are, or could become, ultimately responsible for the kind of person they become. I do reject the assumption, however, that (re)creating ourselves proves an unachievable task, as determinists hold. Moreover, it cannot be denied that we are responsible at least for what kind of reaction we assume to the past and the present events in our lives and in our world.

1.1.2 Situation, projects, and responsibility: Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*

The last point has been of a major significance in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and French existentialism. In his essay on the topic, Robert Wicks points out that the existentialist notion of living freedom entails realization of human potential. Those who are chained to fallacious beliefs in "absolute constraints," which are in fact "contingent and breakable," are acting against their true potential – they are living in bad faith (2006, 216).[10] As far as choice is concerned, French existentialists place great emphasis on freedom, yet with considerable recognition of the socio-political-historical context and of all the impediments standing in one's way:

> This tension between our freedom and the implications of being a concrete and contingent individual located in space and time defines (…) an outlook that struggles to preserve triumphantly a measure of self-determination within an overwhelming historical world that determines the language we will speak, the social values we will initially absorb, and the sorts of daily problems we will need to manage, long before any one of us happens to appear. (ibid., 212-213)

For Sartre, freedom and action can exist only *in a situation*. To be in a situation implies an interconnection of the agent's attitude towards the so-called "facticity". The facticity is the given or the pre-established: "It is *my place*, *my body*, *my past*, *my position* in so far as it is already determined by the indications of Others, finally my *fundamental relation to the Other*" (2003, 511).[11] In Sartre's philosophy, the place is more sophisticated and elaborate than merely in terms of one's birthplace or current location. It is not a matter of simply being there. The present place can be endowed with meaning only related to a (state of) being not

[10] Frederick A. Olafson in his essay "Freedom and Responsibility," discusses Sartre's concept of "bad faith," that consists in employing "various stratagems" to acknowledge that we are not free to choose: "We insist, for example, that we 'have no choice' when we obviously do, no matter how inconvenient it may be for us. We also talk about ourselves as though we were all of a piece, endowed with some 'nature' from which all our actions, no matter how objectionable they may be to others, flow as if by some unchallengeable logic of necessity" (2006, 269).

[11] Sartre explicates five of these structures of the situation: my place, my past, my environment, my neighbor and my death. In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, for instance, being "a married woman" in the nineteenth-century Europe or being "a mother" is discussed in the book's section on situations.

yet attained, that is related to our projects and their end or purpose. In Sartre's view to be there is

> to have to ride my bicycle and to put up with the fatigue of a hot afternoon for two hours if I wish to see my friend Pierre, to take the train and pass a sleepless night if I want to see Annie. (…) For a soldier, "to be there" is to be a hundred and ten, a hundred and twenty days from his discharge. The future – a projected future – intervenes everywhere; it is my future life at Bordeaux, at Etaples, the future discharge of the soldier, the future word which I shall write with a pen wet with ink – it is all this which means my place to me and which makes me exist with nervousness, or impatience or nostalgia. (ibid., 514-515)

The meaning of Bolette's town (the place) is thus dependent on her future projects related to the distant world of travel and study. However, this statement may sound problematic, since her "actions" cannot be grasped in their entirety as plans or projects; they function more as longings, rather than concretely intended activities. The environment, on the other hand, comprises the instruments that surround us with their "peculiar coefficients of adversity and utility" which are manifested as such through the project (ibid., 525).[12] In conclusion, since all the elements are intertwined, in order to understand what being in the world implies, we must investigate the three layers of reality that constitute the individual's concrete situation. These are the preexisting meaning of the environment/the instruments, the preexisting meaning which is in the subject (his/her body – race, physical appearance, nationality), and the Other as a "center of reference" for these meanings (ibid., 531).

Sartre places immense emphasis on the power to act, i.e. "to modify the *shape* of the world" (ibid., 455). The actions we take are defined in terms of a preconceived end, i.e. to act involves an intention and a presupposed result. An agent is not bound to predict all the consequences of the activity, yet, in order for an action to count as such, it has to be a project.[13] He points out that men, embedded in their unfavorable historical situation, do not mobilize themselves to change, not because they have become used to it, as many falsely would believe, but because they perceive that situation "in its plenitude of being and because [they] can not even imagine that [they] can exist in it otherwise" (ibid., 456-457). Therefore, the moment a person develops awareness for a new and better situation, they will "decide"

[12] They are already meaningful, but their meaning is also relative and relational: "I have a flat tire, the sun is too hot, the wind is blowing against me, etc., all phenomena which I had not foreseen: these are the environment. Of course they manifest themselves in and through my principal project; it is through the project that the wind can appear as a head wind or as a 'good' wind, through the project that the sun is revealed as a propitious or an inconvenient warmth" (ibid., 526).

[13] Sartre exemplifies this concept of (deliberative) action with the comparison between two explosions: "The careless smoker who has through negligence caused the explosion of a powder magazine has not acted. On the other hand the worker who is charged with dynamiting a quarry and who obeys the given orders has acted when he has produced the expected explosion; he knew what he was doing or, if you prefer, he intentionally realized a conscious project" (ibid.).

that the present situation is simply intolerable (ibid.).[14] Furthermore, he puts a sign of equivalence between choice and consciousness, something he relates to what psychologists pointed out in their claim that consciousness is selection: "One must be conscious in order to choose, and one must choose in order to be conscious" (ibid., 484). One final important remark regards the "fundamental choice". Wicks finds similarities between that conception and Descartes's view on the agent's accountability – in terms of one being always in possession of the right to say "no," to accept or reject a given proposition (2006, 219). Sartre gives the following example:

> If I am mobilized in a war, this war is my war; it is in my image and I deserve it. I deserve it first because I could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion; these ultimate possibles are those which must always be present for us when there is a question of envisaging a situation. For lack of getting out of it, I have chosen it. This can be due to inertia, to cowardice in the face of public opinion, or because I prefer certain other values to the value of the refusal to join in the war (the good opinion of my relatives, the honor of my family, etc.). Any way you look at it, it is a matter of choice. This choice will be repeated later on again and again without a break until the end of the war. Therefore we must agree with the statement by J. Romains, "In war there are no innocent victims." (2003, 574-575)

According to this philosophical outlook, one should assume absolute responsibility and take control over one's future. In spite of the current situation, one is always capable of altering the project and subsequently unchaining a different outcome.

1.2 Literature review: The subplot's reception

The other reason why some of *The Lady from the Sea*'s initial criticism was far from favorable, apart from the ostensible mysticism, was the considerable space Ibsen dedicated to the play's subplots. William Archer, in his Introduction to the English translation of the play, locates the weakness in the subplot as the general failure of the drama and its subsequent poor appreciation by the critics. He points out that, parting from *The League of Youth*, the subplots in this play are the most emphasized: "for my part, judging them by the high Ibsen standard, I find neither of these subplots particularly interesting" (1912, 208). Similarly, Ronald Gray argues that, although they serve the purpose of showing Ellida's exclusion from Wangel's family, they are unnecessary for the advancement of the storyline and "take up too much time for the sustaining of dramatic interest" (1977, 127). In addition to the "several minutes of

[14] There is also an intention behind this enduring of excruciating conditions. Sartre brings up the example of a worker who continues to work for a miserable salary because he cannot envision a positive change. On the other hand, he works as well for fear of "dying of starvation," which is nothing else than a project to save or preserve a human life or the ones of the worker's family (457, 459).

casual conversation," in the beginning of every one of the five acts, the subplots comprise two-thirds of the final act "before the brief appearance of the Stranger at the end" (ibid.). In his in-depth analysis of the play in *Text and Supertext in Ibsen's Drama*, Brian Johnston stresses that the plot in *The Lady from the Sea*, in comparison with the other two plays from the so-called Munich Trilogy, "is expansive to an extreme (…) leisurely in the pace with which it unfolds its multiple plots and puzzling in its presentation of the differing discontents of the women, (…), who are variations on the same theme" (1989, 200). In this analysis, however, I will concur with Martin Esslin, who claims that in Ibsen's drama deep motivations and meanings are hidden in-between "the most trivial everyday exchanges of small talk" (1980, 74). From my perspective, they, in equal measure, add to our understanding of the play and simultaneously render it more intricate and its meaning elusive to be grasped.

Whether or not the aforementioned technical issue tarnishes the textual cohesiveness, the fact remains that in scholarly analyses of the play a certain attention is frequently attributed to the "sinister subplot," as Joan Templeton labeled it in *Ibsen's Women* ([1997] 1999, 199). Critics regularly locate the guilt in the societal oppressive forces that created an unjust custom perpetuated through the centuries. Hence, although they define Bolette's impending marriage with Arnholm in economic terms as a business transaction, in most cases they do not go to great lengths to cast the blame on her. Yvonne Shafer sees the subplot not so much as a disturbance in our engagement in Ellida's drama, but as an additional reminder of the distressing reality of the play's context. Namely, even though one couple may come to agreement, love and happiness, the consideration of marriage in practical traditional terms is predominant in society (1985, 70). Elinor Fuchs argues against male critics who read the concept of (absolute) freedom in the text in metaphysical terms. From her perspective, this is "Ibsen's most painful play about the fate of women in male society" that deals with concrete freedom within marriage (1996, 54). For Fuchs, Bolette is a "figure of near tragedy" (ibid.) who is viciously "maneuvered into marriage" (ibid., 56).[15]

From this perspective, Bolette is generally fashioned as a victim who is being lured into marriage by a significantly older man, Arnholm, for whom she feels no passionate attraction and no love. Yet, she agrees to his financial-marital offer, being the only way she can achieve her dreams of studying and experiencing the world. After all, in the critics' view,

[15] Fuchs addresses the proposal scene as "gynicide" (1996, 57): "She [Bolette] tries to negotiate a narrow zone of selfdetermination. 'I can study anything I want,' she reminds him, after dubiously rising to the bait at the edge of the carp pond. He answers, ever so smoothly, 'I'll teach you, just as I used to.' No sooner has a stutter of agreement to marry this unsavory person, at least sixteen years her senior, crossed Bolette's lips, than he slides into an obtuse intimacy, 'Ah, wait till you see how easy and comfortable we'll be with each other,' he murmurs, his arm oiling around her waist" (ibid., 56).

it is the male-driven society that does not offer equal opportunities to females, leaving them with the only path available – to find a wealthy enough marriage companion who will provide both for their everyday needs and for their more ambitious projects. Thus, a girl or a woman passes as a protégé (John Stuart Mill would bluntly say as "a slave") from her father's home to her husband's. In his illuminating article "Exchange in *A Doll's House* and in *The Lady from the Sea* – Barter, Gift, and Sacrifice," Jørgen Dines Johansen writes that "later, stark necessity may force Bolette to contract a marriage anyway, (…) in order to survive, she will not be allowed the freedom of choice" (2007, 38). Johansen reads her compliance in light of the burden of "the legal, social, and economic inequality between the sexes" where nothing has changed since the time Ellida was forced to marry Wangel (ibid., 39). His conclusion is that both Bolette and Ellida renounce "passionate love" in order to obtain sustenance and survive in the world. However, renunciation of passion in Ibsen "seems a precondition for true humanity" (ibid., 39-40). In her influential and much discussed *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, Toril Moi argues that Arnholm avails himself of "scare tactics," tinging his brutal proposal with threat: "His final 'Think carefully, Bolette' is pure menace" (2006, 312-313). Bolette's word choice, expressed in the line "rather take me," for Moi suggests that she feels not only "sexually threatened," but also conscious that "she is agreeing to commodify herself" (ibid., 313). Similarly, in *Den umulige friheten*, Helge Rønning underscores that men seem aware that women are supposed to be treated as commodities: «Det mannlige prinsipp slik det framstilles i *Fruen fra havet*, går ut på at kvinnen er noe mannen kan skaffe seg» (2007, 335). And the female position in those limited circumstances is one of an object, not of a real agent, as Anne Marie Rekdal points out in her Lacanian reading of Ibsen's drama, *Frihetens dilemma* (2000, 209). Bjørn Hemmer is another critic who emphasizes the trapped existence of women during Bolette's time: «Særlig i skildringen av Bolette har Ibsen tegnet et ganske dystert bilde av unge kvinners sosiale situasjon i 1880--årene» (2003, 378). Bolette, who "allows" herself to be bought, does so because «For henne finnes det ikke mange andre utveier i det lille samfunnet» (ibid.).

A few other interpretations take a more critical stance, like those of Joan Templeton and Sandra Saari (1985); hence their analyses bear a hint of condemnation of Bolette's acceptance of Arnholm's proposal. Templeton, in her seminal study *Ibsen's Women*, claims that the play's end can be read as positive only without "the dark drama of Wangel's daughter Bolette" (1999, 199); whereas Saari argues that "What she has done would make any 'ideal woman' proud: she has refashioned her own deepest longings to conform to Arnholm's desires. She has taken the first step in following the patterns of Arnholm's incorrect image of

her" (1985, 29). The illogical in this statement is how Bolette is reaffirming and conforming to Arnholm's image of her waiting and longing for him, when in Ibsen's text she actually dispels that misunderstanding.

1.3 Research question, methodology, and design

1.3.1 Research problems, questions, and perspectives

The opinions presented above come from reputable critics and Ibsen scholars, and certainly there is some truth in many of them. I, nevertheless, maintain that *part* of those assertions is the flawed repetition of commonplace beliefs which comprise the problem of women's rights historically – the truism that women were lacking in independence, whether economic, legal, or political, and that their condition was deplorable. Whether manipulated into marriage or accepting the bargain with open eyes, each view deprives Bolette of responsibility and control over her choice (critics will argue that she has no choice at all to begin with). Both Fjelde, and more recently Jon Nygaard, have lucidly emphasized that in the process of reading, it is indispensable to look outside the box of preexistent criticism and "to see each work afresh, as still largely uncharted country" (Fjelde 1978, 380).[16] The two premises in the mainstream criticism, that Bolette is *forced* to marry in order to sustain herself and thus renounce "(passionate) love," and the other one that conveys a mild criticism of her acceptance of Arnholm's offer despite not loving him, raise certain doubts. Those doubts arise logically, demanding an answer to some basic questions regarding marriage custom at the time. If it is necessary for Bolette to marry someone who could provide for her, inasmuch as the unjust nineteenth-century laws made it unfeasible for a woman to have independent financial means, what happened to those who remained single, since it is impossible to encounter a society in which all its members are married? Further, was marriage truly the *only* option for women? And still more, if we cast the blame on Bolette, who like Ellida allegedly resigns herself to the fate to have a loveless marriage, does that presuppose that all women, as well as men, married someone they deeply cherished and loved?

The play's prismatic qualities contribute to the richness of perspectives at the critics' disposition. So far, the work has been analyzed in light of psychoanalysis, feminism and

[16] Nygaard's criticism is significantly aimed at the project *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* and the Norwegian/editors' attitude that suggests knowing the proper way of reading and interpreting Ibsen's texts. See his article "To See Ibsen through New Eyes, We Have to Close the Old," in *Proceedings of the International Ibsen Seminar* 2009, Dhaka, Bangladesh (Dhaka: Centre for Asian Theatre, 2010), 34-39. See also his review of *HIS*: "*Henrik Ibsens Skrifter. Med Innledninger og kommentarer* (Vols 1-5)," *Ibsen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 127-138.

Kierkegaardian existentialism, whereas in contemporary criticism the eco-critical perspective appears frequently. As one could expect, Ellida's specific condition is motivating criticism's weight to her psychological drama, the existential issues and the mythical or even gothic poetry that permeate the text. In-between these aspects, the socio-political background of this play, though addressed, is not as prominent.

Ibsen wrote his plays in the nineteenth century; therefore, and understandably enough, the scholarly literature is extensive. However, in spite of some quite illuminating analyses in articles and book chapters (some of which I have already mentioned), the subplot has never been subjected to a more comprehensive scrutiny. Scholars are usually prone to look upon it as a mere repetition of Ellida's case. To my knowledge, subplots within Ibsen's opus have never exclusively been the object of focused analysis in a thesis. Hence, the present text aims to fill those two gaps: it is intended as a close reading of the action in *The Lady from the Sea*'s subplot regarding freedom of choice, while simultaneously offering a critical reevaluation of the main discussions in scholarship in light of the sociopolitical context.

Toril Moi has nicely pointed out that *The Lady from the Sea* is a play "fundamentally concerned with the force of woman's promise of marriage" (2006, 311). Though, in addition, I would claim that this play is also concerned with marriage as a choice. I think we are offered two examples wherein the situations regarding proposals and acceptance are not as clear-cut as we are led to think. I attempt a closer examination of the most important aspects of the institution of marriage, in view of it being an (imposed) option for nineteenth-century women. For that purpose I shall only briefly touch on Ellida's acceptance of Wangel. The reason behind this decision lies in the fact that the play's main plot deals with the protagonist's current situation and life with Wangel, i.e. we are given only glimpses of Ellida's circumstances or her outlook on life during the time of Wangel's proposal. We are, however, offered a direct insight into Bolette's case, which is illustrative in many ways of the condition of a nineteenth-century middle-class woman. Hilde's function in the play is far from negligible, therefore, I also consider it important to include a closer study of her main scenes for the sake of advancing my argument.

In terms of method, I embrace the existentialists' approach of veering between the consideration of agents in a more generalized way, embedded in a particular socio-historical context, and the attention given to the concrete individual and his/her distinct lived experience and personal history (Wicks 2006, 214). Wicks further points out their "gap-focused" or "fissure-focused" principles of analysis, which I will apply to a certain degree in the thesis,

i.e. the French existentialists' general interest for what is labeled as the "Other," the "subordinate" and the silenced, or to what is being "unsaid" and left out:

> instead of examining the contents of the foreground presences, one examines the overlooked background; instead of considering what is said, one considers what remains unsaid or understated; instead of focusing upon the key figures in social institutions, one focuses upon the marginalized and dispossessed. (221)

The overlooked background (the Other) in feminist debates is of course the woman. Additionally, I shall extend this approach to a closer exploration of the neglected backdrop of alternative possibilities. What I mean by this is expressed in the main question in my thesis: Why would marriage (*at any cost*) be the most desirable option for Bolette, and for most nineteenth-century women? I shall seek to look through all the labels that have been attached to this subplot thus far and attempt to answer to what degree Bolette, or Ellida for that matter, was a helpless victim of social circumstances that erased her individuality, shaped her existence, and subsequently orchestrated her unhappy fate.

1.3.2 Overview of the thesis

I am well-aware that the topics of gender, class ideology, and the social-political context are tightly interwoven. Thematically, the dialogues in Ibsen's text overlap, some of them can be discussed in the chapter on ideology as well as in the chapter on the nineteenth-century stereotypes, like the Ideal Woman. Rigid boundaries cannot be set; however, I have attempted to draw a line between the emerging middle-class phenomenon of the New Woman as opposed to the ideal of the eternal feminine (Chapter 3), which leads the analysis to the theme of immobility and the issue of potential that never realizes itself (Chapter 4), and finally to the problem of (un)willing compliance with the class ideology (Chapter 5). All three chapters intersect in the following one (Chapter 6), in which I read certain dialogues as a (meta)critical denouncing of the participators in the societal oppression. The ambiguity, to which I often refer in the course of the analysis, culminates in the personal/emotional aspects of Bolette's situation. They will be discussed in two chapters – a general chapter on love in nineteenth-century society, including on the function of Hilde's character (Chapter 7); and in Chapter 8, I shall point to some rather contradictory moments from the text, which render a strictly socio-critical reading of the subplot problematic (Chapter 8). The final two chapters (Chapter 9 and 10) conclude the analysis, coming full circle to end up where I begin, i.e. reception, scholarship and the problem of the parallel between the plot and the subplot.

1.3.3 Editions and translations

A translation, as much as the work itself, stands apart as an original creation and it may be a rather difficult task to decide which one proves to be best. The following comment made by Hilde illustrates my dilemma: «Jeg tør næsten bande på at han går og frier til hende» (Ibsen 1999, 681). In Michael Meyer's version, that line is translated as: "Do you know, I think he's courting her" (1980, 201). Peter Watts renders it in the following way: "I could almost swear that he's gone and fallen in love with her" (1965, 322). In Frances E. Archer's translation we read: "I could almost swear that he is making love to her" (1912, 396). Eleanor Marx-Aveling renders it: "I could almost swear he's proposing to her" (1910, «https://www.marxists.org/archive/eleanor-marx/works/los/los05.htm»). In Fjelde's version we see: "I could almost swear that he's been courting her" (1978, 680). And finally McFarlane, in a similar fashion with Fjelde, goes with: "I'll bet you anything he's courting her" (1966, 116). So, is he courting her, proposing to her, in love with her, or making love to her; and is she almost sure or could she bet anything? Far from being a good judge, mainly because of my rather limited knowledge of Ibsen's Norwegian, I opt for Marx-Aveling's line. Arnholm in fact proposes to Bolette, something the reader already knows, since that scene precedes Hilde's comment. Additionally, and more importantly, what it is being demonstrated with the word choice is Hilde's incredible, even eerie intuition, to which I refer in greater detail later in the analysis. But then, could "courting" in the 1950s, 60s and 70s (when respectively Meyer's, McFarlane's and Fjelde's translations were published)[17] signify a more serious commitment that would lead to a proposal and marriage? I am also dissatisfied with the translators' failure to deliver the meaning of «tør» which is an appropriate word that defines her perfectly; she dares to say, to claim, or to bet on the truths that no other character would acknowledge.[18]

Nevertheless, I myself have not gone to great lengths doing a comparative analysis between the original and every available English translation of the play, since English is not my mother tongue and, as already mentioned, my Norwegian skills are not perfect. Therefore, I shall count on the general high esteem held by scholars of *The Oxford Ibsen* translations, in particular, this 1966 version done by James McFarlane. In referencing, I shall only indicate

[17] Meyer's translation was first used in the 1958 *BBC* adaptation (1980, 126).

[18] Kay Unruh Des Roches's article "A Problem of Translation: Structural Patterns in the Language of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*," makes a point why using the original is always the best choice. For the non-Norwegian speaking readers, she explicates that parting from the English translations it is impossible to spot the incredible recurrence of lexical repetitions in the text, something the original makes evident (1987, 311). But even with Ibsen's Norwegian "we do not grasp so subtle a use of language on a first reading. We must have the leisure to pause and reflect" (ibid., 315), something which I was made aware of in the course of my textual dissecting of *The Lady from the Sea*.

parenthetically the page number of the quotation. Whenever needed, I will refer to the original, namely the *Hundreårsutgave*, Henrik Ibsen Samlede Verker XI (1999 [1934]) or the *Henrik Ibsens Skrifter* bd. 8 (2009) and to all of the above mentioned English translations at my disposition.

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Instead of going to Sartre's extremes of suicide, in what follows, I shall present the functioning of some of the structures of the given (the facticity). I am referring to the broader contemporary European and Norwegian context, that informs the backdrop of Bolette's concrete situation in view of freedom and the rights of women. Taking them into account, a reader gains greater insight into the actual maneuvering space given to the contemporary woman, which on the other hand, is relevant for my analysis of the determinism/free will problem. I have opted to give a short presentation of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory separately from the previous overview of French existentialism, since she discusses the *historically embedded* woman's situation. In addition, I shall introduce John Stuart Mill's "feminist Bible," as it has been called by some. The other elements of Bolette's background (her microplace, her past, her pertaining to the middle class) will be discussed in the textual analysis.

2 SITUATIONS AND CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF EUROPE AND NORWAY

2.1 Some thoughts on the wider European background

2.1.1 John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*

There is not a study on women's condition in history which does not refer to one classic in feminist literature and women's movement, namely John Stuart Mill's essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Gail Cunningham described his work as "By far the best and most powerful plea for female emancipation before the emergence of the New Woman" (1978, 7). Additionally, Mill has many times been pointed out as a possible influence on Ibsen's literary worldview regarding the gender issues, presumably through the translation made by Ibsen's friend and fervent supporter, Georg Brandes.

Mill does not put the female condition throughout history in mild terms – he articulates it as a remnant of slavery: "If ever any system of privilege and enforced subjection has its yoke tightly riveted on the necks of those who are kept down by it, this has" (1989, 123, 129). His multileveled elaboration takes on several directions. He discusses the alleged woman's character and emotional disposition which makes her unsuitable for education and other activity that involves rational and practical thinking. He convincingly dismisses it as fallacious by stressing the case of the British queens[19] and other notable women of literature. He then strongly argues for equal rights regarding occupation, inheritance and offspring.

Mill does acknowledge the existence of good marriages where partners come to equally love and respect each other (ibid., 149-150). Nevertheless, he forcefully advocates for giving legal power to women, in addition to their right to become fully independent, educated individuals like any man. He supports this demand by pointing out that every man, "the most brutal, and the most criminal" (ibid., 195) has unquestionable power over his wife and many of them come to exert it. Therefore, laws must be adjusted to despotic men, since marriage as

[19] Mill writes about the monarchs Elizabeth (I) and Victoria: "We know how small a number of reigning queens history presents, in comparison with that of kings. Of this smaller number a far larger proportion have shown talents for rule; though many of them have occupied the throne in difficult periods. It is remarkable, too, that they have (…) been distinguished by merits the most opposite to the imaginary and conventional character of women: (…) for the firmness of character and vigour of their rule, as for its intelligence" (ibid., 170-171). Beauvoir notes that there were periods (the Renaissance) when a particular emphasis was put on individuality (regardless of sex). However, overall, "the wife's legal status remained practically unchanged from the early fifteenth century to the nineteenth century". She makes the same point that queens, saints and courtesans were the rare examples of women who enjoyed more liberty in those times (2010, 117-118).

an institution is not exclusively limited to the enlightened and comprehensive husbands: "Men are not required, as a preliminary to the marriage ceremony, to prove by testimonials that they are fit to be trusted with the exercise of absolute power" (ibid., 151).

What I find interesting for my analysis is Mill's standpoint that emphasizes *circumstances* and previous conditioning as a plausible reason for the contemporary women's situation and for the long surviving myths regarding their talents and character. Mill, a compatibilist philosopher himself, blames upbringing focused on turning women into meek self-sacrificing beings, as a valid enough reason why improvement in that area was not attainable in the previous centuries:

> If women are better than men in anything, it surely is in individual self-sacrifice for those of their own family. But I lay little stress on this, so long as they are universally taught that they are born and created for self-sacrifice. I believe that equality of rights would abate the exaggerated self-abnegation which is the present artificial ideal of feminine character, and that a good woman would not be more self-sacrificing than the best man. (ibid., 158)[20]

Furthermore, Mill regards women's emancipation as beneficial to the development of society and to the ennobling of the male gender as well.

2.1.2 Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*

In her collection of essays *What is a Woman*? (1999), Toril Moi gives an extensive overview of the twentieth-century feminist theory. Moi places particular accent on Beauvoir, whom she considers forgotten and neglected in contemporary debate on gender. According to Beauvoir, a female body does not make one a woman, she has to transform it first into a 'lived reality,' through a process of "conscious activities and choices" in a certain context (1999, 71). Therefore, "the study of concrete cases – of lived experiences – will tell us exactly what it means to be a woman in a given context" (ibid., 76) since there cannot be any "generalized gender identity" dissociated from the woman's concrete world and situation (ibid., 81).[21]

Beauvoir's treatise, *The Second Sex* (1949), is a meticulously done thoroughgoing analysis of the women's condition. Beauvoir notes that women's problem is not just theirs: inasmuch as it has always been men who "held woman's lot in their hands" (2010, 148), they

[20] Regarding early shaping, Halvdan Koht is, however, of a different opinion. In his view, Ibsen's women are fashioned as rebels precisely because "social pressures and schooling had not yet inhibited their naturally independent emotional and intellectual life" (1971, 384). This statement regards the educational system responsible for creating rigid minds in men, who become incapable of independent thinking, and who lose touch with their emotional side.

[21] Moi draws upon this existentialist background in her analysis of *The Lady from the Sea*. Namely, in the conclusion she stresses that "Ibsen understands that one always chooses in a human situation, not in the abstract and the absolute" (2006, 314).

are part and parcel of the problem of female emancipation, as well as of the solution. She elucidates that, just like in the United States, where there was not a black problem but a problem that the white majority had with colored people, or just as there was not a Jewish problem, but a problem anti-Semites had with Jews. Equally there was/is not a women's problem, but a problem men had/have regarding female equality. Additionally, men who have the power to change women's future will first take into consideration their needs and make decisions based on their own fears and plans (ibid.).

Similarly to Mill's perception, Beauvoir sees the traditional marriage, in which a woman is subordinated, as a continuation of "the feudal regime" with the husband being "the wife's guardian" (ibid., 110). However, the trap of ambivalence that holds women captive consists in the odd reality that it is through marriage that women achieve greater social integration: "the woman most fully integrated (…) is the one with the fewest privileges in the society" (ibid.). A woman seeking for some sort of emancipation could attain it only outside marriage – for instance, the (single) daughter or the widow at certain periods could come closer to a man's freedom (ibid.). This integration is accompanied by a great loss. Unlike a man, a woman had to make a radical rupture with her past, including to take her husband's name and to belong to his class, religion, family, even his profession: "She follows him where his work calls him: where he works essentially determines where they live; she breaks with her past more or less brutally, she is annexed to her husband's universe" (ibid., 442).

Marriage, on the other hand, was considered a sort of duty to the society. In order to not let their daughters end up as social "rejects," a "social waste," mothers did their best to find them husbands; the girl's opinion could not have mattered less (ibid., 441). However, as Beauvoir intelligently points out, in spite of these limitations, in some women's viewpoints (particularly in those from the upper classes), marriage entailed benefits. Some of the privileges relate to the economic security and the consideration of the "career" of being a married woman as "honorable and less strenuous (…) than many others" (ibid., 342). In addition to offering the woman integration into society, the marital relationship enables her realization as both a lover and a mother (ibid.). However, it is first the surrounding to depict marriage as desirable for the girl: "Everyone unanimously agrees that catching a husband – or a protector in some cases – is for her the most important of undertakings" (ibid.). For Beauvoir, the embracing of the profitable *career of a married woman* is comprehensible, if one takes into consideration the "unrewarding" character of professions accessible to women (ibid., 444). Yet, she does not tire of reiteratating that women become not just accomplices in

their disadvantaging situation; but in many instances, they advocate the masters' ideology more fiercely than their husbands (ibid., 663):

> women always try to keep, to fix, to arrange rather than to destroy and reconstruct anew; they prefer compromises and exchanges to revolutions. In the nineteenth century, they constituted one of the biggest obstacles to the effort of women workers' emancipation: for every Flora Tristan [French feminist pioneer] or Louise Michel [French anarchist], how many utterly timid housewives begged their husbands not to take any risk! They were afraid not only of strikes, unemployment, and misery; they also feared that the revolt was a mistake. Submission for submission, it is understandable that they prefer routine to adventure: they eke out for themselves a more meager happiness at home than on the streets. (ibid., 642-643)

This outcome is due not only to the small privileges women attain by accepting a submissive position, but also to what Sartre pointed out in his example with the miserable worker, i.e. they have never experienced the joys and advantages of freedom and are incapable of envisaging a world wherein they enjoy the same rights as their male companions (ibid., 643).

The early feminists strongly emphasized the need to grant girls access to education, since they would be in charge of the upbringing of the future generations.[22] In this treatise, Beauvoir makes a convincing argument for opening careers for women and investing in their education, since it seems a "criminal paradox" to refuse them access to the male professions (or even education) because they are deemed inept, while simultaneously being recklessly assigned the care for the future generation (2010, 567). She forcefully advocates for economic liberation – the legal rights conferred to women (for instance, the right to vote) are of little importance, if they remain confined to the small universe of their households, economically dependent on their husbands. Whereas every fight for legal liberties is praiseworthy, nevertheless "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male" (ibid., 721).[23] Beauvoir's makes a rather admirable effort to (self)critically assess as many aspects of the women's situation as possible. For instance, her claims that even in societies where women's rights are granted, "longstanding habit keeps them from being concretely manifested in customs" (ibid., 9), and that one ought not confuse

[22] I am referring to the feminist writers Marie le Jars de Gournay, Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft and Camilla Collett in Norway, who thought that by means of writing socially engaged literature, they would be able to awaken women (Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2013, 62). Wollstonecraft sees gender equality as "first and foremost question of justice" (ibid., 34, my translation). She stresses the idea of the benefits of female education not only for women themselves: «[Hun] mente at kvinner måtte gis utdanning fordi det var kvinner som oppdro morgendagens borgere» (ibid., 59). Christine de Pizan is another feminist who advocated for women's right to education: "If the custom were to put little girls in school and they were normally taught sciences like the boys, they would learn as perfectly and would understand the subtleties of all the arts and sciences as they do" (as quoted in Beauvoir 2010, 117).

[23] Beauvoir's view coincides with the one held by H. E. Berner, one of the founders of the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights. He thought their engagement should be focused not so much on the fight for the right to vote, but on making women economically independent. Therefore, he fervently supported and initiated reforms regarding female education and work possibilities (Agerholt 1937, 77).

the (abstract) achievement with the access to concrete opportunities (ibid., 152) in cases where the actual real-life circumstances are quite disadvantageous. In conclusion, liberation must be collective (ibid., 664) implying a responsibility for one's life: "A free individual takes the blame for his failures on himself, he takes responsibility for them: but what happens to the woman comes from others, it is others who are responsible for her misfortune" (ibid., 646). Just like the other existentialists, she reaffirms that complaining and passing the blame to others helps little; it is bad faith. One is in a situation due to one's reaction to circumstances, i.e. to the structures of the facticity of one's own life. I shall return to this point in the textual analysis.

2.2 The Norwegian socio-historical context

Based on her travelling experience through Scandinavia, the British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft declared that the Norwegian society was «det frieste samfunn hun hadde møtt» in terms of the freedom and the respect women enjoyed (Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2013, 28). However, the Norwegian pioneering feminist author and Ibsen's friend, Camilla Collett, delivers a discouraging picture of what a normal life for a nineteenth-century woman was. In her essays and her novel *The District Governor's Daughters* (*Amtmannens døtre*), she presents an overt critique of the well-established practice of arranged marriages. As she elucidated, it was not a question of emotions to whom young women or men would marry, but of reason and calculations. Even in Norway, the female condition differed little:

> På Camilla Colletts tid hadde de fleste kvinner verken utdanning, forsørgelsesmuligheter, stemmerett eller eiendomsrett, og ekteskapet var en fornuftsinstitusjon snarere enn en kjærlighetsforbindelse. (...) Kvinners manglende mulighet til å forme sine egen skjebne og styre sitt eget liv kan sies å være den råde tråden i Camilla Colletts forfatterskap. Mangelen på kontroll og styring over eget liv fører mange kvinner ut i dyp ulykkelighet, ifølge Collett. (ibid., 60)

Collett denounced also the unequal, or better inexistent, opportunities and double standards regarding men and women. Whereas it was women's task to stay at home, wait, suffer, tolerate and create a cozy haven for their husbands (ibid., 62), men, by contrast, developed talents, satisfied interests, conquered new worlds and led an active life.

Work was not an option for the married bourgeois woman in the nineteenth century – a conclusion than can be drawn to encompass the general European context – in spite of the changes and laws that in that regard were steadily made, in some countries sooner than in other. Caught between the seesaw of the social constrictions and the impossibility to work on

the one hand, and the lack of financial independence on the other, the imposed principle was either/or, i.e. choosing the lesser of two evils. Namely: either a woman yields and marries the man her family (in most cases, the father) has chosen for her; or she becomes a burden to the male members of her family and a societal outcast. Seemingly and paradoxically, the lesser evil was to get married. Even though forced to embrace arranged marriages, both men and women believed in the sanctity of that institution.

Nevertheless, these are generalizations that comprise the situation of the upper and the middle classes of the Norwegian/ European population. Women from the lower social strata, although not significantly freer in terms of choosing their future husband, were still in some respects more active and free than the bourgeois women. The ones who lived in the countryside, on farms, for instance, shared the position of the male farmers – when it came to attending to the farm, everyone had to work and contribute (ibid., 89-93).[24] For the poorer women in the cities, the only work available was the one of maids, servants, cooks, and governesses in the richer families, or as simple workers in the factories. Therefore, it seems rather puzzling that «Det var særlig borgerskapets kvinner som var underlagt strenge kjønnsrestriksjoner» (ibid., 114); yet, simultaneously, the ambition of the bourgeois woman was to get married, not to find work or become independent.

Notwithstanding the fact that every child, male or female, was raised to believe that is was their duty to get married and procreate, in reality that proved to be impossible for many. In Norway, the socio-historical circumstances impeded marriage for many women, mostly due to the high death rate among men and to their notable emigration to the United States (ibid, 117). Accordingly, the number of unmarried women was staggering and constantly increasing:[25]

> Bare mellom 1801 og 1835 steg andelen ugifte kvinner med 42% på landsbasis, mens hovedstaden opplevde nesten en fordobling. Slike galopperende tall ga økte statsutgifter hvis kvinnene ikke fikk mulighet til å forsørge seg selv. Fattig- og sykehjelp kostet, selv om man fikk lite offentlig velferd den gang. Det var et mål å holde utgiftsnivået nede. Løsningen ble å gi rettigheter til mennesker som formelt og reelt sett befant seg utenfor de privilegerte gruppene. For mens kvinner fra lavere sosiale lag kunne ta og tok seg arbeid, var de mange uvirksomme og

[24] One should additionally keep in mind that the Norwegian farmers did not exactly belong to the lower strata.

[25] Norwegian society, according to historians, was a society of spinsters: «Det høye antallet ugifte kvinner har fått etnologen Tone Hellesund til å ta i bruk begrebet «peppermøsamfunnet»» (ibid., 117). This was, however, not only a Norwegian trend. In Great Britain, these women were chauvinistically called "surplus" or "superfluous" women and there were not just few of them. The 1891 census revealed a number of "just under 2.5 million unmarried women in a total population in which there were approximately 900,000 more females than males" (Ledger 1997, 11). These women were useless for the society since they were unable to produce (legitimate) citizens. Additionally, they represented a menace to the "separate-sphere ideology: uncontained by spouses they risked spilling out into the public sector, becoming public and visible" (Richardson and Willis 2002, 4).

> ugifte «tantene» en sosial og økonomisk belastning for borgerskapet og den nye middelklassen. (Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2013, 98)

All these changing circumstances in Norway led to relatively fast reforms with respect to women's rights, at least seen from the perspective of the utmost inactivity and perpetuated status quo that had been a corollary of the female condition. The first wave of changes happened in 1839 and 1840, when several laws were enacted to liberalize the economy and hopefully solve the problem of the vast number of unmarried women. In 1839 single women over 40, lacking in any other means and unprovided for by their families, were given the right to become master craftsmen (ibid., 28-29, 78). The well-off classes who had significant power in their hands, in this particular context – the class of the civil servants, the *embetsmenn* – were reluctant to promote or even embrace possible changes on the matter. The business establishment, suddenly faced with the challenge of unchaining a greater transformation, did not look forward to the opening of the market for women, and thus strengthening its own competition. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that the reforms in the Norwegian Parliament, *Stortinget*, were initiated by the representatives of the Norwegian farmers, who wanted to break monopolies and open the market for themselves as well (ibid., 73). Presumably the most groundbreaking was the 1842 law that gave unmarried women over 25 (widows, spinsters, and wives separated from their husbands) the right to conduct business. The 1854 inheritance law gave both to sons and daughters the same rights to inheritance, whereas previously male heirs inherited twice as much as their sisters (Agerholt 1937, 5-6; Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2012, 93). What was truly significant about this law, and what distinguished it from the previous ones, was that it did not differentiate between married and unmarried women, whereas previous laws (granting rights to conduct business) did not comprise married women, only single ones (Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2012, 93). As a matter of fact, married women achieved their right to a separate ownership decades later, in 1888, and the right to conduct business in 1894 (ibid., 85, 110).

Regarding occupations a womon from the middle classes could have, they most likely were that of teacher, salesperson, secretary, telegraph and telephone operator (and other office work in banks and insurance companies), or some activity related to products manufacturing, such as crafts.[26] After 1854 the telegraph and telephone offices hired many women, which unchained a general positive trends regarding women's employment.

[26] According to Agerholt's study, the 1865 census revealed that out of a total number of 4966 office workers, 358 were women. The 1875 census showed an increasing number of 1315 women, whereas in 1890 there were 4538 women who did office work (1937, 6). She does not mention how many men did the same job, so it is hard to estimate the percentage; however, the figures reveal a tendency of increasing female involvement in the sector.

Nonetheless, Agerholt lucidly points out that a working young woman had to fight against biases and overcome obstacles:[27] «Det var for uvant og merkelig. (...) En ung pike som vilde være lærerinne f.eks., når hun hadde sitt gode utkomme hjemme, blev regnet for emansipert, gal, eller det het sig at hun led av kjærlighetssorg» (1937, 6-7). She summarizes that the first women who looked for employment grappled with "men's distrust in their abilities," since up till that moment women were assigned only the management of the household (ibid., 7). At work, they were given "the most boring (…) assignments" and earned half or even a third of what a man earned for the same work (ibid., 8, 180). They encountered the same prejudices in higher education; the academic institutions and professors proved skeptical and unwilling to grant them access:

> Det var en enkelt kvinne som med energi og viljekraft søkte saken fremmet, men ellers har det neppe vært noe utbredt ønske blandt kvinner om å få adgang til Universitetet. Det finnes ikke avis-innlegg fra dem, enn si petisjoner som i kvinnestemmerettskampens dager. (ibid., 57-58)

Discussing the case of Cecilie Thoresen, Agerholt emphasizes that it was due to the individual initiative of few passionate young women, and some enlightened men, that university education became possible for them.

[27] «Alle de uforsørgede kvinner som brøitet sig frem til et eller annet levebrød, hadde mange skranker å rydde til side, mange fordommer å overvinne» (ibid., 7).

3 THE ETERNAL FEMININE AND THE NEW WOMAN IN THE EUROPEAN AND NORWEGIAN FISH POND: A DEADLOCK OF CONFLICTING FORCES

3.1 Performance and context

In contemporary times it has become commonplace to consider gender as performative and as something learned during the process of socialization. A performance implies play-acting and assuming a role. Marvin Carlson, in his analysis of performance in society, gives an overview of the dissonant thoughts on the problem of roles, play-acting, and the true self. His introduction spans philosophies such as Plato's repudiation of mimesis and Nietzsche's paradoxical: "if someone wants to *seem* to be something, stubbornly and for a long time, he eventually finds it hard to *be* anything else;" (as quoted in Carlson 1996, 42) to William James's views on the self as intricate, constituted of "material, social, and spiritual constituents" (ibid., 45). James's conception of the 'self' seems unstable since it also comprises the part of the observer and the audience. It implies an internal, immanent part as well as external agents. More precisely, he stresses that there are "as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him [the person] and carry an image of him in their mind" (ibid.).[28] James also argued for another 'self of all other selves' which will make the selection, discarding the other selves (ibid.). But how are we to locate this so-called true or genuine self, if it ever existed to begin with? If we live in a performance state permanently and if our lives inhabit performance roles, as Nietzsche claimed, then we become them. Carlson further discusses social constructionism, whose representatives, notably Alfred Schütz, maintain that there are not any given or preexistent principles or rules of social performances. The patterns are "constantly constructed, negotiated, (…) and organized" in a process of "pragmatic piecing-together of pre-existing scraps of material" (ibid., 49). According to Schütz in our lived experience

> clear and distinct experiences are intermingled with vague conjectures; suppositions and prejudices cross well-proven evidences; motives, means and ends, as well as causes and effects, are strung together without clear understanding of their real connections. There are everywhere gaps, intermissions, discontinuities. (ibid.)

[28] In *The Lady from the Sea* this translates into the recurrent theme of illusionary images and perceptions of the other, which are located in our own consciousness, rather than in reality (although one might consider even the concept of reality as problematic). Ellida's image of the Stranger is different from Wangel's or Lyngstrand's image of him. Bolette's image of Arhholm and Arnholm's of her, are also differing.

Seen from this perspective, the agent still has a voice and freedom; s/he is responsible for the final collage that encompasses previous experiences, conditioning and future projects. Similarly, existentialists, (parting from Heidegger and parting notably from Sartre) argue that "existence precede the essence," i.e. we are not born as something, rather we become something in the course of our lives.

Both the eternal feminine and the New Woman can be defined as nineteenth-century ideals. The image of the New Woman, which gained popularity in fiction and in real context in the late nineteenth century, evokes a single, independent, and working woman. She is generally depicted as intelligent, educated and well-read, challenging traditional roles, and advocating for the women's cause. Ibsen played a crucial role in the birth of this phenomenon. Gail Finney, in her essay "Ibsen and Feminism," summarizes that this female model "values self-fulfillment and independence rather than (…) the ideal of self-sacrifice" of the Ideal Woman. She strives for "legal and sexual equality," has a profession and earns her living. The New Woman believes in education and reading, she is unconventional in her physical appearance and choice of clothes (1994, 95-96). Finney argues that even though Ibsen's characters (she discusses Lona, Petra, Rebekka and Hilde from *The Master Builder*) "were influential for the conception of the New Woman, they cannot be wholly identified with this type" (ibid., 96). From my perspective, this is rather understandable, since the description and worldview of the New Woman may be still regarded eccentric even at the present time. For instance, their unconventional attitude towards marriage as a union based on mutual love, willingness and understanding and not upon *legal binding*. For the contemporary societies (with few exceptions, for instance, the Norwegian) this still sounds radical and unacceptable.

However, not everyone is of Finney's opinion regarding Ibsen's characters. In the essay "Ibsen, the New Woman and the Actress," Sally Ledger argues that "It would be an exaggeration – but only a small one – to claim that Ibsen invented the 'New Woman' in England" (2002, 79). In an earlier study, Ledger localizes this literary and historical/factual type as emerging strongly in the 1880s and especially in the 1890s, although the term has been "stretched" to comprise fictional characters as well as early real-life feminist figures. For instance, in 1913, an author for the *Bookman* traced the existence of the New Woman in literature for nearly sixty years, with Ibsen's Nora being one of the first heroines (1997, 1-

2).[29] Gail Cunningham, another author concerned with the same topic, in her *The New Woman and Victorian Novel*, also brings up Ibsen:

> Far more significant (…) was the 'Ibsen boom'. (…) What *Punch* termed 'Ibscenity' – undisguisedly sensual women imprisoned in miserable marriages, the ravages of venereal disease, a wife slamming the door on husband and children – became also the stuff of the New Woman fiction. (1978, 46)

This New Woman pertained to the middle classes; Cunningham rightly points out as "pointless to warn the working-class woman against the evils of arranged marriage to a dissolute aristocrat, or to urge her to undertake activities more fulfilling than embroidery and visiting" (ibid., 11). With the characteristics that I listed above, the New Woman was seen as a logical continuation of the more moderate "'advanced' or 'modern' women," who fought for reforms in the field of women's rights in alliance with enlightened men (ibid., 3-4).

3.2 The New Woman by the pond

Even though examination of the individual's internalization of dominant social values and ideals proves an arduous task, it is worth attempting an analysis. The carp pond scene, with its highly concentrated symbolism, gives valuable material in view of Bolette's space; her own outlook and her reaction to that context, which further reveals her position especially in view of progressiveness or sticking up to already established models:

> ARNHOLM [*walks across to* BOLETTE]. Are you sitting here all on your own, Bolette?
> BOLETTE. Oh yes. That's what I generally do.
> (…)
> ARNHOLM. What books have you got there?
> BOLETTE. Oh, one of them is a thing on botany. And the other's a book about geography.
> (…)
> ARNHOLM. But you are still just as fond of reading as ever.
> BOLETTE. Yes, I read anything I can lay my hands on… Anything educational. One likes to know what is going on in the world. We are so cut off from things here. Very largely, anyway. (70)

Even in this relatively short fragment one can gain significant insight: she generally sits alone, which implies a life of isolation, or at least lack of social life and company for stimulating conversations. The absence of personal contact is mitigated by her reading habits. She reads a

[29] Declan Kiberd is another critic who discusses some of Ibsen's female protagonists as New Women, in particular Nora and Hilde in *The Master Builder*. See "Ibsen's Heroines: The New Woman As Rebel," in *Men and Feminism in Modern Literature*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), 61-84.

book on botany and one on geography, which furthermore discloses her interests and personal traits: the relation to plants, flowers in particular, and her desire for distant places and knowledge about the outer world.

This book on botany is juxtaposed to her conspicuously caring attitude, which we see in her commitment to keeping the order and the normal functioning of the private universe of the Wangel family. The book further refers to flowers that are brought into relation with her in several scenes throughout the play. Her first appearance is marked by flower arrangements, namely she carries a vase of flowers and after the conversation with Ballested and Lyngstrand, she brings even more from inside the house. In Act II, when she and Hilde climb the prospect and leave all the others behind, she begins picking flowers that she gives afterwards to Lyngstrand. Prima facie, Bolette's bouquets as a symbol are more connected to death than life. She first brings out vases of flowers in commemoration of her mother's birthday, and secondly as a symbol of her compassion for Lyngstrand's fatal illness. They stand to indicate sadness, tender feelings, and compassion. The ambiguous nature of the opening scene and the flowers will be discussed additionally in chapter 9. The only mention of flowers other than arrangements and bouquets are the potted plants inside the garden room. In the stage instructions in Act IV it is mentioned that there are "*flowering rose and other pot plants*" (85). It is interesting to note these potted plants in the garden room during summer, when nature is blooming outside in its environment. Potted plants signify her nurturing tendency, since unlike flower arrangements in a vase, they require constant tending and dedication. On another level, they also symbolize the uneasiness that both Ellida and Bolette feel in Wangel's home, away from their own element where they belong. Ellida, who was "dragged, transplanted" from the North and the open sea to a secluded place, finds a relief from that uneasiness by constant escapes to the sea, whereas Bolette alleviates it with a persistent self-persuasion that maybe it is after all "the carp pond" where she actually belongs and not the big fascinating world.

Books can often be interpreted as a means of evasion – a substitute for the stifling reality. However, as we are told, they have always been her interest, not only a recent one. It is interesting to note her claim that she reads everything she lays her hands on, "anything educational" (70). Her choice of books indicates there is nothing nonsensical about her. She wants knowledge and information. Her preference shows a behavior that in her time might be considered "unwomanly". The New Woman is regularly associated with books and education, which urged the conservative proponents to become concerned about the consequences of that obsession: "It was generally feared that what women read about, they might do, and thus the

new type of novel appeared to threaten the whole domestic structure" (Cunningham 1978, 18). Richardson and Willis note two dissimilar variations of the New Woman: "one as seeking stimuli in the outer world (movement, experience, education), and the other as dreamer – the writer, for example" (2002, 30). Both of them converge in Bolette. Her desire to break the confinement has to be acknowledged; while equally caught in the social patterns, a character like Hedda would rather listen about the world she is fascinated by, namely the world of men.[30] In Bolette this is manifested not so much in listening to narrations about the big happenings somewhere in the distant world, as in reading about it. The emphasis of praxis, experience and action, as opposed to nonsensical daydreaming, is also clear in her recognition that duties come first, not pleasure and interests; she reads whenever she finds time between the chores:

> ARNHOLM. You like reading that sort of thing?
> BOLETTE. Yes, when I can find the time. But looking after the house comes first.
> ARNHOLM. But doesn't your mother… your stepmother… doesn't she help you with that?
> BOLETTE. No, it's my job. After all, I had to do it for those two years when Father was alone. (70)

After her mother's death Bolette has become, in Helge Rønning's words, "hjemmets ansvarlige sentrum" (2007, 335). Throughout the play, she is regularly illustrated as immersed in some activity. With the exception of the scenes where there is walking or dancing involved, in every scene we see her as she arranges flowers and chairs in Act I, picks flowers for Lyngstrand in Act II, sews in Act III, embroiders and arranges the dinner in Act IV. On the other side, it is also evident that she does not embrace the household duties gladly or at least with neutral feelings. Even though she does not complain about her condition, her word choice reveals that she found herself in a position of a household keeper – it was a responsibility imposed on her. She does not state that she *began* doing the chores, but that "it's her job," something she "*had* to do" during the years Wangel spent as a widower.

The Ideal Woman, the eternal feminine, the angel in the house – these are synonymous key terms that represent the feminine ideal of the nineteenth century. In *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-67,* Françoise Basch, who draws on authors like Charles Knightly, summarizes this angel-woman as "the natural, and therefore divine, guide, purifier and inspirer of the man" (1974, 5-6). This woman has become simultaneously "the pillar of the home and the priestess of the temple" (ibid., 8). In *The Fall of Public Man,* Richard Sennett notes that the study of roles has been usually limited to lists of definitions of

[30] For more on the problem of fragmented experience in the aforementioned play, see Frode Helland's "Irony and Experience in *Hedda Gabler," Contemporary Approaches to Ibsen* 8 (Oslo: Universitetetsforlaget, 1994): 99-119.

a behavior appropriate for a certain context and situation. According to Sennett, this role-play is not an automatic behavior; there are also codes of belief involved: "how much and on what terms people take seriously their own behavior, the behavior of others, and the situations in which they are engaged" (1992, 33). Being presumably the most Victorian of all Ibsen's female characters, Bolette's sense of what a proper behavior should be is particularly keen. Her manners are impeccable and from all three female characters in the play, she is the one who most strictly abides to socially accepted forms of conduct, at the very least, this is the impression that is created upon superficial glance:

> ARNHOLM. Hm! I think perhaps you do yourself an injustice there.
> BOLETTE. Ah, I'm afraid not. Besides, Father has so little time to think about me and my future. Not much inclination either. Anything like that he avoids, if he can. He's so occupied with Ellida…
> ARNHOLM. With whom?
> BOLETTE. I mean that he and my stepmother… [*Breaks off.*] Father and Mother are very much wrapped up in each other, you know. (72)

Her attitude throughout the play is always one of a well-composed and properly behaved person. As a matter of fact, the above dialogue contains one of the few lines in which one gets a glimpse of a more "natural" and spontaneous behavior on her part. She gets carried away with her confession, lets her guard down, and Ellida's name accidentally slips out.[31]

Yet, when asked by Arnholm (who might have been expecting to hear about marriage) about her innermost desires, unlike a typical nineteenth-century (Ideal) woman, she does not dream about a husband, home or children. She wishes to leave and longs for learning, which makes her quite progressive, and thus contradicts a possible implication that her past shaped her entirely:

> ARNHOLM [*sitting down beside her*]. Tell me, Bolette my dear… living in this place, isn't there something… something special I mean… you find yourself longing for?
> BOLETTE. Yes, perhaps.
> ARNHOLM. What sort of thing? What is it you find yourself longing for?
> BOLETTE. To get away.
> ARNHOLM. That more than anything?
> BOLETTE. Yes. And after that… to learn. To get to know more about all sort of things. (71)

Her answer is of no surprise when her youth is taken into account; she already has been living for years a life of a married woman, even without a real husband. In addition to the maintenance of the household, she is vigilant in checking if Wangel drinks too much or if

[31] For Beauvoir, the self-control required from a girl/woman smothers spontaneous expression and provokes internal tension. It "becomes second nature for the 'well-bred girl'" (2010, 347).

Hilde behaves herself. She already has a surrogate husband of whom she has to take care ("I cannot leave father") and a child to educate of what is right and wrong. The most astonishing thing is that she was urged into life of duties and responsibilities presumably in her late childhood or early adolescent years, since her mother must have be deceased approximately eight years.[32] Beauvoir, in her chapter on girls' childhood years, states that it is usually the older girl who is initiated in (maternal) household chores. Instead of being a carefree child, the "overburdened" girl becomes prematurely a woman, i.e. "a slave condemned to a joyless existence" (2010, 300). When a girl is encouraged, she manifests "boy's" characteristics: vigour, initiative, fearlessness. Sometimes that happens if she has a boy's upbringing, an education usually given by a father. One risk is present: there are female relatives (grandmothers, aunts and cousins) who take over the mother's duty and "counterbalance the father's influence" (ibid., 295). It is a woman's "curse (…) that in her childhood she is left in the hands of women" (ibid.). Perhaps, Ibsen was well aware of this danger when he created a host of female protagonists strongly attached to their fathers, or raised without mother's influence.[33]

For the New Woman, marriage was regarded as an option instead of a strict priority. It represented more of a partnership with a man, rather than a legal binding. For an Ideal Woman, marriage was the inescapable and much desired future. Forced to grow up overnight, it is of no wonder Bolette dreams of seeing the world and studying instead of getting married. Her answer to Arnholm "to get away" is also poignant, it implies to leave behind the small town where she lives, the home she inhabits, the condition she encounters herself in, and her present life in general, which hardly contributes to her image of a meek householder. This answer could be read as a cry for change; however, it is a change that never arrives. I will discuss in detail the reasons for that situation in the next chapter. In the *Lady from the Sea* the oppression of the confined suffocating space has usually been related to Ellida's condition. If Ellida's escapes to the fjord are considered a rebellion against the oppressive society hostile towards aliens and eccentrics like she is, then the suffocation of Bolette's dissatisfaction emerges, in my view, as even harsher. She does not raise her voice in protest, nor has she an escape route. Her "world" is vague and presumably distant, unlike the sea for Ellida, or the substitute for the sea – the fjords.

[32] Wangel says that he has been married with Ellida for five-six years (99) and he was a widower for two years (70). When Arnholm left eight-nine years ago, Bolette's mother was still alive (37-38). Therefore, she must have passed away not so long after his departure.

[33] Ellen Hartmann analyzes from a psychoanalytical perspective some of the female characters, among whom Ellida, who were raised without mothers. See her article "Ibsen's Motherless Women," *Ibsen Studies* 4, no. 1 (2004): 80-91.

Martin Esslin in "Ibsen and Modern Drama" points out one striking characteristic of Ibsen's drama. The shock his plays caused was only partly due to their socio-political subversive discourse; in fact, critics often complained about "the obscurity and incomprehensibility" of the "*mystificateur*" Ibsen (1980, 73). Before there were strict and precise dramatic conventions to which audiences grew accustomed, whereas these new characters forced them with the task of "having to decide for themselves what the motivations of many of the characters' otherwise unexplained actions might be" (ibid., 74). In addition, Esslin reminds us of the difficulty "that in most cases people do not even *know* their own motivations and could thus not express them even if the dramatic convention allowed them to do so" (ibid.). Gay Gibson Cima's discusses the same quandary only from the actor's perspective. Complex polysemous characters, such as Solness or Hedda, presented a new challenge for the contemporary actors, some of whom considered necessary reading Ibsen's plays even five-six times or studying the characters for more than two years in order to capture their "spine" (1983, 15, 17).[34]

Bolette in many aspects is a perfect representation of the transition and the contradictions of her time in the wider European or narrower Norwegian context. Like the books that she reads – one indicating travel, movement and discovery of new perspectives, the other implying roots, firmness and immobility – she as well can be placed among the above-mentioned characters who mock any definite judgment. I shall focus more attention on these and other ambivalences in her lived situation in the next chapter.

[34] Alla Nazimova made a rather insightful comment on the matter: "They are in a way difficult to understand, it is true, not because they are artfully mysterious, but because they are real and therefore like all real people not to be classified by a simple formula. They are full of the pettinesses, the peculiarities, the inconsistencies, the contradictions that we find in everybody we know intimately. That is what makes them so fascinating; that is why we want to learn more of them" (as quoted in Cima 1983, 17). Drawing upon her experience as an Ibsen translator for the British stage, Inga-Stina Ewbank elucidates the problem of translating the multiple layers and ambiguities in Ibsen's texts. See her interesting article "Reading Ibsen's Signs: Ambivalence on Page and Stage," *Ibsen Studies* 4, no. 1, (2004): 4-17. See also Joan Templeton's disagreement with McFarlane's, Ewbank's, Kittang's and Bentley's positions in "Advocacy and Ambivalence in Ibsen's Drama," *Ibsen Studies* 7, no. 1 (2007): 43-60.

4 IMMOBILITY AND STATUS QUO: DESIRES VERSUS UNPOETIC REALITY

4.1 Outgrown carp and past regression

The first act revolves around past and memories; Ellida's attachment to her life by the sea in her youth is only one case in the long line of characters' recollections. In the opening scenes it is juxtaposed to another lament for the past – the commemoration of a deceased person's birthday – Wangel's first wife. Arnholm's memories are of Ellida at the time when he proposed and of Bolette and the time when he was tutoring at the Wangel's estate. Wangel's, of his late wife and of the happy moments in his first years spent with Ellida. These are nostalgic resonances of what happened even a decade ago. Immobility reigns in this small town and in the lives of these characters who are caught in the grip of their past and of the impossibility to expand, modify or break the fixed structures in the tiny community. Upon his arrival, Arnholm notices how unchanged everything has remained since he left eight-nine years ago (37). Another significant line that supports this argument can be traced in Act III, upon Bolette's confession that reading comes after the duties that she *had* to do for the two years her father was a widower. She states: "it's just remained that way ever since" (70). There are other moments that further corroborate this relentless constancy reiterated throughout the play: the garden and the small town underwent very little alteration during Arnholm's absence, the carp are still blissfully swimming in the pond, Ellida stays the same as when she was a young woman, and Bolette does nothing to change or at least lessen the responsibilities that were in a certain way forced upon her. Therefore, the characters' attitude toward their situation is one of ambivalence; they cling to their past and they show dissatisfaction with their present condition. Far from being healthy, fixity hinders growth and evolution, which are necessary for the individual and the society. The famous metaphor in the carp pond scene is also permeated with this theme:

> BOLETTE. (…) We are so cut off from things here. Very largely, anyway.
> ARNHOLM. But my dear Bolette, you mustn't say that.
> BOLETTE. Oh, it's true. I don't think life is so very different for us from what it is for those carp down there in the pond. They have the fjord close by where the great shoals of wild fish move in and out. But our poor tame local fish know nothing of all this.
> ARNHOLM. But then I don't think it would particularly suit them if they did get out there.
> BOLETTE. Oh, I doubt if it would make much difference on that score.

ARNHOLM. Anyway, you can't say you're all that cut off from life out here. Not in summer at any rate. These days this place is nearly like some great traffic junction, with the whole world in transit….

BOLETTE [*smiles*]. Ah yes, anybody in transit himself, as you are, no doubt finds it easy to make fun of us.

ARNHOLM. I… make fun? Whatever gives you that idea?

BOLETTE. Well, all this about being one of the world's great junctions, this is just something you've heard the people of the town say to each other. They do tend to say something of the kind.

ARNHOLM. Yes, in fact I have noticed that.

BOLETTE. Actually, there's not a word of truth in it. Not for us who live here permanently. What good is it to us if the world passes through here on its way up to the midnight sun? We can't ever join them. We shall never see any midnight sun. Oh no, we have to go on living here in our nice little fishpond. (70-71)

Bolette remarks how cut off people in small communities are and that she needs the books to compensate for the lack of worldly experience. Her contemplation upon their existence both bears marks of self-pity and self-awareness. She doubts that it would make any difference for the carp even if they lived in the fjord instead of the pond. Her comment further illustrates how in some respects the carp analogy is not best suited for land creatures, such as human beings. Humans have consciousness, and if for the fish it is unimportant, for a longing person who has desires, dissatisfaction with the current place can activate the lurking potential for pessimism and depression. "Our poor tame local fish" is suggestive of how she sees herself and the other members of the community. Nonetheless, what differentiates her from the local people is that she is *aware* of how different their life is from the others who do not share her experience of living in small, secluded towns. She suffers from what Erich Fromm termed 'moral aloneness'. In *The Fear of Freedom* (1941), he analyzes the individual's need to be related to the surrounding world. However, this connection with the others does not necessarily involve physical contact:

> An individual may be alone in a physical sense for many years and yet he may be related to ideas, values, or at least social patterns that give him a feeling of communion and "belonging". On the other hand, he may live among people and yet be overcome with an utter feeling of isolation (…). This lack of relatedness to values, symbols, patterns, we may call moral aloneness and state that moral aloneness is as intolerable as the physical aloneness… (Fromm 2001, 15)

She mistakenly takes Arnholm's notice of the place being a great traffic junction for a mockery, since the folk in town, equally "poor tame local fish," who know nothing of the exciting world where changes happen, say something of that sort obviously in order to praise themselves. She, on the other hand, does not consider their town being one of the world's great crossroads, nor does she comfort herself. On the contrary, her blunt, pessimistic despair

that borders on cynicism, is made evident in the bleakest line of the play: "We shall never see any midnight sun. Oh no, we have to go on living here in our nice little fishpond" (71). Again, in this line her word choice is striking: "we *have* to go on living here in our nice little fishpond" that stands to indicate ultimate impossibility for change and lack of any hope. The sun that shines in the middle of the night is a strong and obvious symbol of light and brighter future that barely needs any further stressing.

Ibsen's text poses many questions regarding Bolette's viewpoints, the most striking being from where such pessimism and desperation spring. It is even more puzzling if one strips away the allegorical and symbolic meaning of the sea and the midnight sun, and takes them at face value, as actual places where a person could go. Ellida does not live somewhere inland – the sea is nearby. Similarly, Bolette's place is not located in Southern regions where midnight sun would be considered unattainable. The coastal town is in Northern Norway, not so far away from the tourists' final destination.

Robert Wicks points out the individual's awareness of the inevitable historical place ("historically situated individuality"), that can lead to a feeling of absurdity, alienation and feeling of disconnection from the other people: "Heightening one's sense of individuality intensifies the difference between oneself and others, and this can lead to feelings of alienation and separation from the world at large" (2006, 214). So how has this sense of her inevitable historical place arisen in Bolette? The evident lack of hope for change may stem from her disappointed expectations to pursue university studies, a promise that remained unfulfilled. In the Norwegian context higher education became possible for young women, but she does not consider it a feasible option. Additionally, as history shows and as I have already pointed out in the Introduction, the second half of the nineteenth century was a relatively dynamic period marked by groundbreaking victories regarding women's rights. The logical consequences of that development would be to see hopes raised high, not desperation. Cunningham also stresses that "By the 1880s the prospects for the woman who was not going to confine herself to the *smooth career* [my emphasis] of wife and mother were significantly less bleak than at the beginning of the century" (1978, 4). I think a possible answer can be found among Bolette's lines on the carp pond existence:

> ARNHOLM. When I used to be your tutor, your father often said that he would let you go to university.
>
> BOLETTE. Oh yes, poor Father… he says so many things. But when it comes to the point… Father doesn't really have much initiative.
>
> ARNHOLM. No, I'm afraid you're right. He doesn't. But have you ever talked to him about it? I mean really gone into it seriously with him?

BOLETTE. No, actually I haven't.
ARNHOLM. But you should, you know! Before it's too late, Bolette. Why don't you?
BOLETTE. Oh, I suppose because I don't have much initiative either. I take after Father in that. (72)[35]

Here she reveals that her aspiration was left fruitless due to her father's lack of initiative. When Arnholm continues to dig deeper into the matter, we come to one of the main moments: "I suppose (…) I don't have much initiative either". Therefore, a great deal of fault for not continuing her studies at university can be traceable in Bolette as well. Certainly, Wangel's blame in it should not be diminished. He is willing to move with Ellida just to help restore her health and peace of mind and plans on leaving the girls in what is currently the Wangel home. One might raise the question of how it is possible that he has the financial means to afford the maintenance of two households, whereas previously it has been unfeasible to pay for Bolette's education. That is partly due to the fact that Ellida's situation demands more attention than his daughter's. In accordance with the proverb "the squeaky wheel gets the grease," Bolette gets no attention at all since her existence is compliant. Even though she is unhappy, she is not protesting or demanding anything; she gives the impression of being simply resigned to her imminent fate.[36]

Her attitude leads to what existentialism defines as inauthentic living. When a person incorporates an outlook that s/he possesses "an unchangeable essence," then "potentialities remain unrealized, imagination becomes constricted and unauthentic lifestyles crystallize" (Wicks 2006, 217). When one seeks to track back the events in *The Lady from the Sea*, if the action takes place in 1888, and the Wangel family have not seen Arnholm in eight-nine years, which chronologically traces his tutoring at the Wangel household at least eight years before 1888, that will indicate that Wangel was planning to send Bolette to university somewhere

[35] In this analysis I embrace McFarlane's translation of Bolette's expression *fremfærd* «Der er ikke nogen rigtig fremfærd i far» and «Å det er vel fordi der ikke er nogen rigtig fremfærd i mig heller, kan jeg tro» (*HU*, 99), where the term is translated as *initiative*. In Meyer's translation, for instance, we read: "he never gets anything done" and "I never get anything done, either" (Ibsen 1980, 164). Peter Watts renders it as follows: "Father has very little real energy" (Ibsen 1965, 278), whereas in Fjelde's version, she says: "there's no real willpower in him" (Ibsen 1978, 636). Instead of "initiative," "energy" or "willpower," Eleanor Marx-Aveling opts for "stamina" (1910, «https://www.marxists.org/archive/eleanor-marx/works/los/los03.htm»).

[36] Although scholarly analyses of *The Lady from the Sea* that embrace psychoanalysis abound, they deal almost exclusively with Ellida's situation. Nonetheless, I think it would be interesting to see an analysis of Bolette's character structure in that fashion. There is plenty of material to analyze there as well; I refer first and foremost to the impression a reader is left with of her low self-worth that might be the reason behind her quiet acceptance of a non-satisfying life, although she is clearly not at all pleased with it. The fact that she lets promises made to her pass by unfulfilled, while simultaneously sacrificing her youthful years for her family, feeling neglected and spending time mostly alone, could arise from that self-perception as well. Additionally, her odd (and rather disturbing) obsession with her father is also deserving of a closer examination.

Hilde, in that respect, does not take after her sister. The ones who make promises to her will have to fulfill them; she waited 10 years to knock on Solness' door and claim what once was promised to her: "Bring out my kingdom, master builder! (…) My kingdom on the table!" (Ibsen 1966, 387).

abroad, since studying in her Norwegian context was not an option for female students until 1882. That renders her talent, intelligence and student potential as even more striking, since they were worth investing and undertaking a move to abroad, which would have meant not only a possibility to study but also to see some of that world she desires so eagerly.

In the aforementioned scene, there is interplay of the problem of biological determinism and social conditioning as hindrance to the individual self. She locates the fault partly in herself, yet she explains the problem in terms of inheriting her father's disposition and temperament. This is also something that Templeton and other critics have defined as "Ibsen's refusal of a dichotomously gendered humanity" (1999, 329).

4.2 Push and pull: Control and power struggles

Ambivalence and ambiguity, in addition to vagueness, are a constant corollary of Bolette's actions. With Nora's exit, Ibsen was accused of creating an unwomanly woman who holds selfishly onto the duty to herself. With Bolette, we certainly have a *feminine* woman, in the traditional sense of the word, and yet she also knows that she has a duty to herself. That clash of woman's duty to herself – to learn and develop talents, on the one hand, and love for her family and acceptance of her social roles, on the other – is very much the core problem behind her conspicuous indecisiveness and constant hesitation. Interestingly, in a certain way, her oscillating attitudes are the underlying cause behind her immobility.

Discussing the aspect of rationalization in ideologies, as seen by Vilfredo Pareto in his *Treatise of General Sociology,* Terry Eagleton writes that ideologies are frequently explained as "rationalisations of a set of (normally unjust) social interests" (1994, 8). As he rightly points out from his Marxist perspective, these (fatalistic or/and stoical) justifications of one's miserable conditions will only "supply [the oppressed groups] with an opiate":

> Indeed we should note here that oppressed groups may engage in rationalization just as full-bloodedly as their masters, persuading themselves that their misery is inevitable, or that they deserve to suffer, or that everyone else does too, or that the alternative might be a good deal worse. Such rationalization on the part of the oppressed may not promote their interests; but they may certainly advance those of their rulers. (ibid., 9)

In the continuation of the fishpond scene, Bolette asserts at least three times the eagerness to find her place in the world, on the one hand, and the attachment to her home, namely her father, on the other. She expresses her wish to get away and learn, then demonstrates that she lacks the initiative to carry out the plan in action: "I don't think I have the right to. Not and

leave father" (72). Then she says that she must also think of herself, and afterwards launches the counterclaim: "But poor Father! I dread leaving him" (ibid.). She explains how Ellida, after moving into their home, proved utterly disinterested in maintaining the household, and then she concludes: "But it isn't fair that I have to go on living here at home, is it? Actually, it doesn't really help Father at all. And anyway I've a duty to myself, haven't I?" (73). Immediately after, she pessimistically reaffirms: "I suppose I was created to stay here in the pond" (ibid.). I see in this hesitation a highly negative undertone of criticism towards inactivity and dependence. I shall return to this critique in Chapter 6.

Mill's observations on the matter are targeting the real reasons behind her vacillating stance. He locates the causes for women's so-called *womanly* behavior in their early upbringing. A girl was being told that her character should be the opposite of that of a boy. She was being taught that her natural disposition (and her duty) was to unselfishly live for others, to serve them and make "complete abnegation" of herself: "not self-will and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others" (1989, 132). The discussion on these topics – the sense of duty and guilt for wanting to acknowledge their personal needs – has a long tradition in gender theory and history in relation to the patriarchal ideal of woman. Bolette's voice conveys rebellious undertones, yet her hyperactive responsibility and passive caring traits are equally dominant and revealing her eternal feminine existence. Toril Moi's account of Beauvoir elucidates *the individual responsibility* for how a woman embraces or disregards prevailing gender norms and models:

> One aspect of that lived experience will be the way individual woman encounters, internalizes, or rejects dominant gender norms. But this encounter is always infected by the woman's situation, and that means by her personal and idiosyncratic history as this is interwoven with other historical situations such as her age, race, class, and nationality, and the particular political conflicts in which she may be involved. (1999, 82)

In spite of Bolette's reluctance to fully identify with the role that was awaiting a nineteenth-century woman, she performs it with devotion. Her constant intellectual hunger demonstrates *will and enthusiasm*, not a complete resignation and lack of action; i.e. when she wants, she does not renounce a passion, books being a case in point. That leads to a paradox that although she was forced to become in charge of the household, it is not to be excluded that her lack of initiative derives from an unresolved *internal* opposition between the duty to herself and the love towards her family, namely she might not want to leave her home to attend university.

This indecisiveness can be also spotted in Ellida's fear and attraction regarding the Stranger. The constant push and pull is visible in both characters throughout the play. This also raises the important question of a possible female power struggle in Wangel's family, which is again linked to the shadow of the deceased mother. Ellida as an outsider does not keep the household as Wangel's late wife: "she's not very good at doing all the things Mother used to do so well. There are so many things this one doesn't even *see*. Or maybe doesn't want to see… or doesn't care. I don't know which it is" (73). This stands to designate that Bolette's role model of a married woman is her mother; Ellida's actions are incomprehensible for her. Therefore, now that Wangel's first wife is gone, there is Bolette – a keeper of tradition in honor of her late mother – who knows and remembers how she took care of their home.[37] Although on several occasions she tries to smooth things over with Ellida and pretend that there is harmony and understanding between them, still her devotion to the past and to what her mother represented for the family might influence her reluctance to let go of imposed actions. Additionally, this aspect also fits the vagueness of her image marked by conspicuous contradiction. There is a hint of that ambivalence in Act V, again in conversation with Arnholm about the crisis in Ellida and Wangel's marriage:

> BOLETTE. What do you suppose has been the matter with them these last few days?
> ARNHOLM. Have you noticed anything?
> BOLETTE. Have I!
> ARNHOLM. Anything in particular?
> BOLETTE. Oh yes. All sorts of things. Haven't you?
> ARNHOLM. Well, I don't really think…
> BOLETTE. Of course you have. But you don't want to say it.
> (…)
> ARNHOLM. Yes, I sometimes wonder whether it wouldn't be good for everybody if she could get away now and then.
> BOLETTE. If she goes back to Skjoldviken tomorrow, she'll never come back here again.
> ARNHOLM. But my dear Bolette, whatever gives you that idea?
> BOLETTE. I'm convinced of it. Just watch! You'll see…. She'll never come back. Not as long as Hilde and I are in the house, anyway.
> ARNHOLM. Hilde too?
> BOLETTE. Well, it might perhaps still work with Hilde. She's still scarcely more than a child. And I think deep down she worships Ellida. But with me it's different. When one has a stepmother not all that much older than oneself… (109)

[37] The lingering of the memories of the deceased woman is far from negligible; Arnholm remembers her from his tutoring years; Wangel recalls her with nostalgia, the girls miss her and Ellida´s exclusion is partly due to her unsettling presence. Beret Wicklund rightly notes that the attempts made by the others to deny her are in vain: «Alle forsøk på å fornekte henne gjør henne desto mer nærværende. Hun svever under overflaten som en slags mytisk skikkelse, en parallell til havfruen, og virker inn på mannens og døtrenes adfred på en måte som tilsvarer den måten Ellida påvirkes av den antatt døde mannen fra *sin* fortid» (1997, 103).

In this detective-like dialogue, the issue of a female authority in the family is implied. Ellida is not much older than she is, which makes things odd between them. And yet again, stuck in the mermaid metaphor – neither fish nor human – one cannot *fully* claim that the relationship between the stepmother and Bolette is one of open hostility. In Act III, after the defeatist discourse of the midnight sun, Ellida, feeling happy and excited, joins the conversation. They begin talking about the sea and the direction that human evolution took. Bolette again reinforces her pessimistic vision of the future: "[*with a sigh*]. Ah, no. We have to be content with dry land" (74). Ellida soon gets carried away by melancholy and gloominess:

> ELLIDA. Yes, it's sad but true. And I believe that people suspect something of this themselves. And bear with it as with some secret sorrow. Believe me, here are the deepest springs of human melancholy. Yes, believe me.
> ARNHOLM. But my dear Mrs. Wangel… I don't get the impression that people are so terribly sad. On the contrary, I think that most people live happy and pleasant lives… quietly, serenely, joyfully.
> ELLIDA. Oh, no, it's not at all like that. The joy… is a bit like the kind of joy we take in the long sunlit summer days. It contains a threat of the long dark days to come. And this threat cast its shadows over human joy… like a passing cloud that casts its shadow over the fjord. There it lay so bright and blue. Then all of a sudden…
> BOLETTE. You shouldn't give way to sad thoughts like this. Just now you were so happy and so full of life… (75)

Bolette regains composure and consoles her step-mother, even though her own condition and thoughts are neither lighter nor sunnier. If gender is performed, as Butler and other theorists would claim, empathy (or genuine solidarity) is not something that can be acted or feigned – either a person feels it or not. It is only Bolette who takes pity on Lyngstrand, and perhaps once Ellida. Neither Wangel (being the doctor who examined him) nor Hilde, even less Arnholm (who shows signs of jealousy), are eager to be as compassionate towards him as Bolette is. Moreover, whenever needed, she is there to be the linking element in the family. However, that presupposes assuming a position of a people-pleaser and a conflict-avoider. On several occasions, some of which I have previously discussed, she is shown as suffocating feelings and pretending to feel fine with her condition. One of them is her preference to avoid the problem of her education and confront her father.

What we see in her case is an unsurmountable discrepancy between her individual desires and the social role involuntarily attributed to her. Both willing victim and quiet rebel, she proves to be torn apart between the side of her that would like to follow her mother's example and the strong side that opposes the female role of a homemaker, and that yearns for more, traditionally considered, men's activities and experience, like traveling independently and studying. In Judith Butler's terms, these desires could be seen as a "subversion of

dominant social norms, since we cannot escape power, we can only undermine it from within" (Moi 1999, 58). With an attitude that sways back and forth, it is of no surprise that they all are embedded in their place and past, and that things, as Arnholm notes, have not changed much since he left years ago.

5 CONFORMISM AND THE PROBLEM OF CLASS IDEOLOGY

5.1 The victim's assistance

Even though in Chapter 3 I have discussed Bolette's situation in view of roles and female patterns of behavior related to her class (for instance, the New Woman was a middle-class phenomenon), strict boundaries cannot be set, and some of the other issues regarding the problem of class are addressed in this and in the previous chapter. Strongly related to her situation of being a woman in nineteenth-century Europe and Norway, is the interplay of class values and ideologies to which I regard necessary dedicating a separate chapter.

Beauvoir claimed that it was natural to expect a rejection of limitations by the oppressed, however, what is truly essential is the understanding and the investigation of the reasons behind their compliance with the limiting condition (2010, 422). The way I shall use the notion 'ideology' in this chapter is akin to Terry Eagleton's view expressed in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983): "[the] modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power (1996, 13).[38]

In his essay *On Liberty* (1959), Mill viewed conformism as an ever-present lurking danger. From Mill's perspective, it is important to draw a line between what he calls "the legitimate interference of collective opinion" and individual liberty. Thus establishing a limit to that interference can be "as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism" (1989, 8-9). Conformism presents not only an obstacle to individual liberty, but to the general human progress as well:

> The despotism of custom is everywhere standing hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary, which is called, according to circumstances, the spirit of liberty, or that of progress, or improvement. The spirit of improvement is not always a spirit of liberty, for it may aim at forcing improvements on an unwilling people… (ibid., 70)

This bears resemblance to the existentialist reflection upon "which features of one's psyche and environment are contingent and changeable and which are not" (Wicks 2006, 216). The subplot in question constitutes a strong reaffirmation of the belief that marriage was the only

[38] Eagleton presented a list of definitions in his *Ideology: An Introduction*. The abovecited is a combination of the second "a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class" and the third one "ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power" (1991, 1).

possible option for a woman. Why both Arnholm and Bolette fortify the perception that to get married was essential, whereas historical facts show the unlikelihood that the unmarried woman would have been left without any hope for survival on her own. This contradiction relates notably to the danger of conformity and silent obedience that are constantly on the horizon in Ibsen's works. In what follows, I shall analyze the "commodifying" sections of the proposal scene that are the most discussed in criticism:

> ARNHOLM. Well… if you really don't think you can… then let's keep our relationship as it is, my dear Bolette.
> BOLETTE. What do you mean?
> ARNHOLM. Of course, I still stand by my offer. I shall see to it that you are able to get away from here and see something of the world. Learn something you are really interested in. Live secure and independent. I shall also provide for your future, Bolette. In me you will always have a good and loyal and trusty friend. I want you to know that!
> BOLETTE. Good heavens, Mr. Arnholm! All this is quite impossible now.
> ARNHOLM. Is that impossible too?
> BOLETTE. Of course, don't you see! After what you've just told me… and the answer I've given you… oh, surely you must see that I can't possibly accept all that from you. I can't accept anything from you. Not after this! (113)

After her refusal, Arnholm does not retract his offer; he wants to keep their relationship as it is, and simultaneously to support her aspirations financially. The first time that the help is offered, Arnholm has marriage on his mind; he does not originally intend it to be a financial aid of a benefactor. After her refusal, he does not withdraw the offer. She, on the other hand, does not consider properly accepting unattached help, since that was not Arnholm's initial plan. The problem of his feelings is an additional hindrance here – it will be inconsiderate and selfish act of hers if she takes it. It has been stated that ideology functions as the justificatory and the apologetic dimension of culture, unlike science, which is the diagnostic and the critical (Geertz 1994, 290). After the refusal, a forthright persuasion begins in which the middle-class ideology regarding marriage practices is frankly conveyed:

> ARNHOLM. Would you rather go on sitting here at home, and let life pass you by?
> BOLETTE. Oh, it's agonizing to think about it!
> ARNHOLM. Are you going to abandon all thoughts of seeing something of the world outside? Abandon all those things you say you sit here dreaming about? Knowing that life has so much to offer… yet never having any real contact with it? Think well, Bolette.
> BOLETTE. Yes, yes, Mr. Arnholm… there is a lot in what you say.
> ARNHOLM. And then… when your father is no longer here…. perhaps to be left alone and helpless in the world? Maybe even to have to give yourself to another man… someone perhaps you couldn't feel any affection for, either?
> BOLETTE. Oh, yes… I see well enough how true all this is… all that you say. Nevertheless… And yet perhaps…?
> ARNHOLM [*quickly*]. Well?

BOLETTE [*looks uncertainly at him*]. Perhaps it's not so impossible after all. (113-114)

Prima facie, both of them agree – she will have to get married one day or at the very least it would be desirable to find someone who will provide for her. That future husband might be someone whom she will not even like the way she likes Arnholm now (whichever way that might be) and perhaps not as well-off as he is. I would like to underline that she is still dealing with an offer that does not include marriage, and involves not just daily sustenance, but also education and travel. Whether this is Arnholm's desperate attempt to impress her with his overwhelming generosity, one could only guess. However, guardianship was not such a rare occurrence. One must take into consideration that he does not have children or inheritors, and the reader does not get any clues that he intends to marry in future. Even though he is only thirty-seven, both Arnholm himself and many critics convene that he is old: "And you know… when a man is past his first youth, a belief of that kind [that she likes him] – or should it be illusion – is rather overwhelming" (112). Regardless of his personal motivations and intentions, the impression remains the same – this is a confirmation of the institution of marriage, not of an independent life of work. I shall return to the other nuances of the dialogues in question in Chapter 8.

According to Eagleton, to study ideology includes an examination of "the ways in which people may come to invest in their own unhappiness" (1991, XIII). He refers to cases in which the oppressed themselves may "love, desire and identify with his [the oppressor's] power", because of the "slim bonuses" that the position of being submissive can bring them (ibid.). Due to these benefits "freeing ourselves from ourselves" is one of the crucial (and most laborious) forms of liberation (ibid., XIII-XIV). In his Introduction to the Longman edition of *Ideology*, he discusses the "common dystopian fantasy" of societies wherein men and women become not just loyal citizens, complying with the dominant ideology, they also come to identify with it in the most visceral way. As a consequence – Eagleton writes – all revolt and defiance will become impossible and unimaginable (1994, 18). The purpose of this strategy is to make the oppressive ideology our own. Interestingly, after an elaboration of what this alleged "dystopian fantasy" entails, Eagleton proceeds with the following example: "women under patriarchy are kept in place not primarily by coercion, but by guilt, low self-esteem, a misplaced sense of duty, feelings of powerlessness, fear of alienating the love and approval of others (…) (ibid., 19). He does not explicitly mention women's identification with the dominant ideology as Beauvoir does; however, what is left unsaid is clear enough.

Women can be seen, in the same fashion: as supporters of the contemporary society and class ideology and participators in their perseverance. Bolette's aforementioned agreeing with Arnholm's persuasive explication and this double-layered opening of Act IV illustrate that tendency:

> LYNGSTRAND[…]. It must be awfully difficult to work a border like that, Miss Wangel.
> BOLETTE. Oh, no! It isn't so difficult. As long as you remember to count.
> LYNGSTRAND. Count? Do you have to count?
> BOLETTE. Yes, the stiches. Look.
> LYNGSTRAND. So you do! Fancy that! Why, it's almost like a form of art. Do you also design it?
> BOLETTE. Yes, if I have a pattern.
> LYNGSTRAND. Not otherwise?
> BOLETTE. No, not otherwise.
> LYNGSTRAND. Then it isn't really proper art after all.
> BOLETTE. No it's mostly what you might call… handicraft.
> LYNGSTRAND. Yet I think you might learn to be an artist.
> BOLETTE. When I haven't any talent?
> LYNGSTRAND. Yes, if you could be together with a really genuine artist all the time… (84)

The embroidery Bolette does is not particularly difficult, she claims, if you pay attention and carefully count the stitches. She can also design it, "if I have a pattern". Under the layer of literal meaning that is exactly what women were doing and were expected to do – to create reproductions of previous experiences under a pattern, to pay attention and be careful "in the counting of the stitches" of convention – doing what was "easy" because someone else before them already paved the way. They are denied the possibility of being original creators in a society where in order to connect they have to adjust and adapt to dominant custom. Another clearly indicative moment: she believes that she has no talent to be an artist, a creator of original works. On another level, this is an ironic representation, since Bolette *at least* creates something, even though she follows a pattern. Lyngstrand is only an artist in potential, and yet feels called upon to comment on her artistic skills.[39] What is further striking regarding original "artistry" is how women from early age knew the path they were supposed to take, namely that they were expected to find a husband who would provide for them. Hilde without any self-censorship spits it out in the bluntest form. When Bolette asks her why she is constantly teasing Lyngstrand and that maybe *she* would like to marry him, Hilde replies that

[39] He shall create art not so much out of his own fantasy and imaginative power; his projected sculpture of the unfaithful wife is based on a real-life "pattern" or event, namely the Stranger's act of jealousy upon hearing that Ellida has (re)married. Critics regularly refer to the function of the arts and creation in *The Lady from the Sea*. See, for instance, Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 301-305; Bjørn Hemmer*, Ibsen: kunstnerens vei* (Bergen: Vigmostad Bjørke, 2003), 376-377; Anne Marie Rekdal, "Art and Madness: *The Lady from the Sea* as a Text about Art and the Artist," in *Ibsen on the Cusp of the 21st Century,* ed. Pål Bjørby, Alvhild Dvergsdal, Idar Stegane (Bergen: Alvheim & Eide, 2005), 141-152. See also Rekdal's longer analysis in Norwegian in *Frihetens dilemma* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2000), 183-227.

he cannot afford to marry: “Catch me! He hasn’t got a bean. He can’t even support himself” (55).

The problem of gender, convention, and conformism is in a straight correlation with the question of class ideology. I shall not venture upon an analysis of all the subtleties of the women’s movements in Europe, however it is usually considered that they were first and foremost led by bourgeois women.[40] Cunningham points out the discrepancy between new ideals and the actual every-day implementation. Although one could find real-life women who resembled the iconic New Woman, for most of them that “symbolic figurehead” for “social rebellion” and individual transformation was “generally desirable but personally unattainable…” (1978, 16). And when it came to actual support and political activism, it was not the bourgeoisie that was the loudest. As Richardson and Willis rightly underscore, whereas a vast number of studies deal with the condition of middle-class women, “the dramatic increase of women workers who were joining unions and campaigning for their rights tells another story” (2002, 27).[41] In Basch’s study on Victorian women it is stated:

> As early as 1866 the [first woman’s suffrage] society collected 1,500 votes in favour of the right of female householders to vote, and it rapidly gained ground in Manchester where, in 1867, it collected 13,500 signatures. (...) But by and large feminism of the first part of the Victorian era was of a limited character. It sprang from a few middle-class individuals, even though their audience appreciably increased between 1830 and 1869. (1974, 14)

What is not mentioned here is that the Manchester signatures do not reveal that the local middle-class women were more open-minded and active regarding their cause. Manchester was one of the biggest industrial centers in UK; those signatures came from the working-class women who already gained real experience of earning a living independently and thus understood the need for emancipation, better working conditions, and of the right to vote.

The class with power (and men in the gender issue for that matter) proves regularly reluctant to accept changes that will endanger the future exercise of that power and privilege. In addition, one must not forget the social position of a person occupied within the society. In spite of revolutionary women-figures who stepped out of the societal patterns and decided to become independent, the prestige the institution of marriage enjoyed in the eyes of the bourgeoisie remained for a very long time unaffected: **“**Gifte kvinner og menn hadde i prinsippet høyere status enn ugifte” (Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen 2013, 69). Hence

[40] For more on Norsk Kvinnesaksforening (The Norwegian Association for Women’s Rights; alternative translations: The Norwegian Association for the Cause of Women, The Norwegian Women’s Rights League, Norwegian Society for Women’s Rights), see Agerholt (1937), Rønning (2007), 313-315; and Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen (2013), 114, 117, 137-142.
[41] See also Ledger (1997), 37.

Arnholm's reminder to Bolette that she might end up alone and helpless and forced to marry someone she does not even like, and her subsequent agreement, make an appropriate case in point: no matter how unjust and cruel it might seem to the modern reader today, this was the reality *in the perception of the middle class* at that time.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration regarding female employment of the time: work was still unknown territory for middle-class women. When one casts a closer look upon the Norwegian society in the second half of the nineteenth century, one sees that *for many women* it was sheer necessity that forced them to work. This relates to the authorities' initial plan and intention – to establish legislative measures to enable unmarried women to maintain themselves: «Argumentasjonen for å gi kvinner handelsrett var samtidig klart instrumentell. For selv om det økte kvinners mulighet til å forsørge seg selv, var det aldri snakk om å gjøre kvinner til næringslivsaktører på linje med menn» (ibid., 108). Basch discusses the case of the English sociologist and theorist Harriet Martineau whose family's ruin and loss of "gentility" meant a blessing, she could freely dedicate herself to her writing career (1974, 106). This case from England shows that earning a living was not considered particularly appropriate for a girl from a respectable bourgeois family. As pointed out in the Introduction, Agerholt notes the same trend in Norway, whereas in Ibsen's oeuvre we recall Bernick's complaints about his sister who works as a teacher: "That was monumental stupidity on her part. (…) it's unpleasant for *me*. It looks as if her own brother isn't up to supporting her" (1978, 56).[42]

Additionally, one should bear in mind that it was not just a matter of imposed class rules on girls. By opting for marriage, women are aware of the benefits that the arrangement brings, which are not only food and accommodation, but also other forms of Bolette's "travel and education":

> The bourgeois woman clings to the chains because she clings to her class privileges. (…) liberated from the male, she would be condemned to work; while she might regret having her rights to private property subordinated to her husband's, she would deplore even more having this property abolished; she feels no solidarity with working-class women: she feels closer to her husband than to a woman textile worker. She makes his interests her own. (Beauvoir 2010, 130)

Unlike Martineau's paradoxical stroke of luck, for many women in Norway, and in Europe for that matter, work was not a way to build a career in a sector for which they were specially gifted, or because they were fighting against the patriarchal roles – they did it in need of

[42] Kiberd makes a similar observation regarding Helmer: "Helmer's supposition that Mrs. Linde is a widow speaks volumes for his conviction that no husbanded woman works and his assumption that she will now evacuate a room unbearable for anyone but mothers suggests a cosy assurance that motherhood and work are strangely incompatible" (1985, 67).

sustenance. With the exception of those who proved to have a flair for business and became very successful career women,[43] for a large number of them, work was a constant struggle, not an easy and smooth undertaking.[44]

5.2 Adjustment and resistance

Let us for a moment consider the individual's giving way to ideology in different light. The problem of adjustment, the so-called *acclimatization*, has a special significance in the play. Adaptation to the environment, the leitmotif that recurrently appears in the mouth of the characters, as a concept assumes rather ambivalent tones. In Ellida's case (ironically, as I read it) turns out to be secretly desired and viewed in a positive light; it implies movement and transformation. In Bolette's situation, the early adjustment to an unnatural space, where the individual does not feel she belongs, proves more negative, since she resists accepting her environment till the end. The play's conclusion best illustrates this paradox; adaptation, as many other moments in this text, is also distinguishably ambiguous.

In life one has to follow one's desires, work on carrying out projects, while simultaneously maintaining communication and collaboration with the surrounding environment. Since the former cannot be achieved in isolation, it proves a daunting task to draw the line between that and the interference of the context that Mill wrote about. Isaiah Berlin in his *Four Essays on Liberty* points out the problem of understanding and interaction between fellow human beings. He asserts that this apprehension can be accomplished by means of existence of certain common values: "Those who are out of touch with the external

[43] Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen discuss some of these women; see for instance, 79-87, 96.

[44] Ibsen stressed this contradiction in *A Doll's House*. Kristine Linde's marriage of convenience was instigated by the necessity to provide for her ill mother and her younger brothers: "I didn't feel I could refuse the offer" (Ibsen 1965, 157). Upon her husband's death, she "just had to struggle along" and worked in all the areas accessible to Norwegian women at that time: "I ran a little shop, then a small school, and anything else I could turn my hand to. These last three years I never seem to have stopped working" (ibid.). After her mother's death and her brothers' employment, she comes to ask for Helmer's help "to find some office work" for her. Both Nora and Rank notice her overstrained appearance and try to dissuade her by pointing out that the type of work she wants is "terribly tiring, and you look worn out already" and it will be a good idea to consider a holiday instead of working. Mrs. Linde replies: "I haven't a father to pay my fare, Nora" (ibid.). She then remarks that Nora knows little about "the troubles and hardships of life" (158) and tells Rank that she needs to takes the stairs very slowly, not because of some serious weakness, but because of "overwork". She has come to town not for a rest as he presupposes, but to look for employment because: "One must live, Doctor" (164-165). What we are shown here is the stark irony. Even though she married a rich man for the sake of her family, after his death she ended up without any financial means and was forced to work, something that she should or could have done in the first place, instead of accepting the proposal. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that Kristine Linde's situation is more difficult and akin to the duties a man had, i.e. she worked to provide for a *whole* family – a mother, two brothers and herself; whereas a single woman would have had only to work for herself. Considering Bolette's inclination for learning and how well-read she is, she could have worked as a teacher without a problem. It is questionable, however, whether a position of the kind could have provided her with the means to do what she wishes: to study and gain real experience of the world by traveling. For a critical view on Ibsen's realism regarding work possibilities for women, see Margaret D. Stetz, "Mrs. Linde, Feminism, and Women's Work, Then and Now," *Ibsen Studies* 7, no. 2, (2007): 150-168.

world are described as abnormal, and in extreme cases, insane. But so also – and this is the point – are those who wander too far from the common public world of values" (1969, XXXI). Fromm termed "social character" the selection of essential characteristics shared by most members of the community, which emerge as a result of the interactions and way of life common to that group. He acknowledges that "deviants" will always appear; nevertheless the character structure of most people will be "variation of this [social] nucleus" (2001, 239). This social character relates to what Lucien Goldmann called world views. They are given shape and meaning through "a slow and complex" process that entails the involvement of significant number of individuals of the ("privileged") social group and their interaction (1994, 74).

How could one live in the world, then (which also presupposes communication with other individuals), if one's worldviews are in stark contrast to those of one's surroundings? Does this make Bolette and Ellida wise, in accepting a bourgeois marriage instead of a life at sea, or a proposal over hardship, strife for agency, and independence? In Act IV there is an important discussion of what I would call a micro-adjustment that a woman undergoes. It is not the society that requires it, but supposedly the marital happiness. Moreover, it is for the wife's benefit. Lyngstrand, who knows about marriage from books, remarks that, "marriage must be considered rather like a kind of miracle. The way a woman gradually comes to be more like her husband" (86):

> BOLETTE. Share his interests, you mean?
> LYNGSTRAND. Exactly!
> BOLETTE. Ah, but what about his abilities? And his talent? And skills?
> LYNGSTRAND. Well… I sometimes wonder whether they too…
> BOLETTE. And the things a man acquires by reading and study – perhaps you think they too somehow pass over to his wife?
> LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that too. Little by little. By a kind of miracle. Though I know this only happens in a marriage built on love and faith and genuine happiness.
> BOLETTE. Has it never occurred to you that a man might also be drawn closer to his wife, somehow? Grow more like her, I mean.
> LYNGSTRAND. A man? No, I never thought of that.
> BOLETTE. But if the one, why not the other?
> LYNGSTRAND. Well because a man has a mission I life. And it's that that gives a man strength and firmness, Miss Wangel. He has his life's mission, a man has.
> BOLETTE. Every man?
> LYNGSTRAND. No, no. I am thinking mainly of the artist. (86-87)

This conversation should be taken as ironic. Represented as not particularly clever, Lyngstrand doubts that *a man* can be subjected to the same molding as the woman who lives with him. He sees the her as a blank slate, she does not have any distinctive features or value

per se; she is a moon reflecting the light of her husband, the creator. Lyngstrand's ideas are depriving women even of that role of a "spiritual guide," or "the angel in the house" that Victorian authors write about. After Bolette mentions that the artist is better off living for his art alone instead of getting married, Lyngstrand replies "But he can do that just as well even though he does marry" (87). Seen from this perspective, far from being a moon or a priority, a woman is a second-order being in the hierarchy of an artist's life; she comes after his art and creation.

These worldviews bear resemblance to the ideals within the bourgeois reorganization of gender, namely the marriage couple contemplated as a compatible unity of a rational and efficient male [*homo economicus*] who dominated the public sphere, and a loving, gentle and passive wife [*femina domestica*] who offered a safe harbor for the working, career-oriented husband since, "support of a good home became important assets for the man who wanted to conquer the world" (Frykman and Löfgren 1987, 133-135). Lyngstrand then remarks what a blissful life would be for the wife to live for *his* art as a sort of servant: "the fact of being able to help him to create… Smoothing his path by looking after him, seeing to his wants, and making things nice and comfortable and pleasant for him. For a woman I think that must be marvellous" (87). As Frykman and Löfgren assert, men's unrealistic ideals about femininity were one thing, and the real-life practice another (1987, 135). Bolette destroys Lyngstrand's self-deluded expectations with: "Hm! I'm not so sure… (…) Oh, you don't know how conceited you are!" (87).[45]

Her reply – in Mills terms – traces the *theoretical* boundaries of intrusion that she would not let be transgressed. Yet, *in practice*, her treatment of her father is exactly like Lyngstrand described the relationship of marital partners, and no one imposes those demands on her:

> BOLETTE Poor Father… he has his little failings. Perhaps you've noticed that yourself. And the job doesn't keep him busy the whole of his time. And she's quite incapable of helping him… though I'm sure that's partly his own fault.
>
> ARNHOLM. What makes you think that?

[45] In this thesis I do not discuss biographical resonances or possible models for the creation of the characters, as many critics have done. It has been suggested that Ibsen's mother-in-law, Magdalene Thoresen, served as a model for Ellida. This conversation between Bolette and Lyngstrand makes one wonder how much of her step-daughter, Suzannah, there is in Bolette – extra educated, yet believes she has no talent. Ibsen's wife was opinionated and well-read (presumably more than Ibsen, the artist/creator). She was a firm anchor for him and did everything to "smooth his path" by taking care that he maintained his routine of writing and by keeping away hindrances to his work. Or one might even ask how much of Ibsen there is in Lyngstrand. Lyngstrand asks a young woman to serve him as a muse, like the episodes Ibsen had with the young women (see Templeton 1999, 233-277). Interestingly, his most famous encounters happened after 1888, the publication year of *The Lady from the Sea*. Ibsen was not particularly sympathetic towards the characters that bear resemblances with him. In fact, he seems especially fond of killing or deriding them: he killed Brand, Solness, Rubek, and I cannot help but notice the self-sarcasm in the portrayal of Stockmann and Gregers Werle, or even Rosmer with his mission of ennobling people. All three of them are odd mouthpiece of Ibsen's own ideals and ingenuity in imposing universal claims upon people who are best left at peace with their own illusions.

> BOLETTE. Oh, Father's got to surround himself with happy faces. There must be sunshine and happiness in the house, he says. That's why I'm afraid he often lets her have medicines which will do her very little good in the long run. (73)

It is rather unsettling the mentioning of her "Father" twelve times in the carp pond conversation on only two pages of McFarlane's translation. Ellida cannot help her father, she states, and if she notices a change in Wangel's behavior compared to when she was a child and her mother was alive, she may blame Ellida for that negative transformation (and she blames him as well). One change may be Wangel's problem with alcohol that presumably started after Ellida's predicaments began. In the interest of pleasing Wangel and bringing "sunshine" in his life, she hides her wishes and real feelings and quietly accepts the role of her late mother. It hardly escapes notice that her attitude towards her father, bears undertones of consideration of him as a child, unable to deal with conflicts and problems, so she must always be there to smooth things for him and to feign happiness. In addition to constantly keeping an eye on him, she does not confront the problem of her education because he "has so little time to think about me and my future. Not much inclination either. Anything like that he avoids, if he can" (72). In conclusion, "Smoothing his path by looking after him, seeing to his wants, and making things nice and comfortable and pleasant for him," is exactly what she does with Wangel.

Another lurking Pygmalion-like danger is Arnholm's reaction to her outburst of joy that she can learn whatever she wants.[46] His response that he will teach her indicates in a certain way influence on her viewpoints and interference with her autonomous way of achieving knowledge. This does not necessarily presuppose a problem, on the assumption that a woman is fine with the arrangement, but it becomes one when she wants to be herself, free of external authority. And yet, in spite of what Lyngstrand might be advocating, neither Wangel (who wanted Ellida as she was) nor Arnholm strike as particularly authoritarian and narrow-minded. Neither of them asks their spouse to renounce her interests and oddness. The one who is an obvious representative of the old, patriarchal beliefs of women's place is

[46] The myth of Pygmalion as brought to us in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* X, tells the story of a sculptor who, disillusioned by the real women around him, carves a sculpture of the perfect woman whom he then falls in love with. Venus, the goddess of love, inspires life in the sculpture and it becomes a real woman. This motif appears in Ibsen's works more than once, he wrote a poem in 1850 on the same theme, and he dealt with it most notably in *When We Dead Awaken*. In his fine analysis of this issue (and of Ibsen's relation to classical art, sculpture in particular), Frode Helland pointed out the lack of recognition of the otherness in the other: "This is just how he wants her: childlike, an object offering the least possible resistance, a person whose otherness, whose alien elements, can be denied and subjugated to his own self…" (1997, 88). For more, see his chapter «Kunstverket innenfor kunstverket: «Opstandelsens Dag»» in *Melankoliens Spill* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2000), 372-410. See also Errol Durbach, "Pygmalion: Myth and Anti-Myth in the plays of Ibsen and Shaw," in *English studies in Africa: Journal of Humanities* 21 (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1978): 23-31; and Victor Castellani, "Ibsen and the Return of Myth: *When We Dead Awaken*," in *Proceedings of the VIII International Ibsen Conference,* 1997, Gossensaß (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 257-273.

Lyngstrand. Taking into account that he is not rendered in a particularly good light – his lack of reasoning expressed in unintelligent comments and ingenuousness – we can interpret his view on women as doxa, i.e. "common sense" ideology that can be found in books and coming out of the mouths of naïve, not especially bright men.[47] There is an evident distorting of the Solveig-image here, which men carry within themselves, since neither Ellida nor Bolette spend their lives in vain waiting for the world-wanderer to return to them. The former married Wangel soon after, the latter does that even faster, since her initial pledge was fallacious to begin with.[48] This ideal of woman, passively waiting for a man to return or serving him as a muse or inspiration, is dead in the text; even someone as compassionate as Bolette breaks the promise to Lyngstrand, given out of pity in the first place.

There is one fragment from the proposal scene that deserves special attention. When Arnholm gets his wishes fulfilled, his enthusiastic exclamations are about the happy life they will have together. He will do everything to win her heart:

> ARNHOLM. Thank you! Thank you, Bolette! All those other things you said… all your earlier doubts… I shan't let them put me off. Even if I have not completely won your heart yet I shall find a way to do it. Oh, Bolette, how tenderly I shall care for you!
> BOLETTE. And I shall see something of the world. I shall live! You promised me.
> ARNHOLM. I will keep my promise. (114)

As the problem of adjustment and playing by the societal rules suggest, women were not the only sufferers, although they are the ones regularly rendered as helpless, ill-fated victims of being born into the wrong body. Here we see Arnholm, who will enthusiastically carry Bolette in his arms: «Å, Bolette, jeg skal bære Dem på hænderne!» (*HU*, 146), while she comments on being able to see the world and to live. She has not lived before, one might conclude, therefore this marriage will provide her with that. And yet *he is fine with that arrangement*, he will do his best to dissipate her doubts of the two of them as a couple.

Overlapping the private (emotional) and the public (professional/financial), if one checks the accounts of the professional life of men, functionaries, and other white-collar employees, as Jan Eyvind Myhre in his analysis of the middle classes in Norway

[47] In *Ibsen's Dramatic Method,* John Northam arrives at a similar conclusion: "...Ibsen holds his romanticism up to ridicule, proving it mere irresponsibility; for the sculptor intends to repay Boletta for her devotion by transferring his attentions to young Hilda on his return" (1953, 143).

[48] That point has been forcefully made by Bjørn Hemmer, who relates both cases of male egotism: «Det er for øvrig tydelige likhetstrekk mellom hans ønske om at Bolette skal gå hjemme og tenke på ham mens han ferdes ute i den frie verden - og det krav som *den fremmede* har stilt til Ellida om på ubestemt tid å forbli trofast i hans fravær. Ti års venting krever den fremmede som den mest naturlige ting av verden! - Lyngstrand vil ha Bolette inn i en tilsvarende underdanig, passiv rolle» (2003, 382). See also Beret Wicklund, «Ibsens kvener og havfruer: Myter, samfunnskritikk og overføring i *Fruen fra havet*», *Edda* 1, Stort Ibsen-nummer (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997): 107.

demonstrates, one comes to discover that functionaries "did not have shorter working hours than the workers. (…) Shop attendants were expected to work very long and irregular hours, often until nearly midnight" (2004, 128). The same was valid for most of the white-collar jobs, where the "work discipline was as harsh as in a factory, and the hours were just as long" (ibid.).[49] The way the nineteenth-century society was set, whether or not they were fit for it, everyone had to play a certain role and adjust to it, if they wanted full participation in the society. Women would marry, bring dowry, and be denied work possibilities in order to take care of the family and the household. The husband's duty was to provide the financial means. But then, how talented were men at earning and taking care of their spouses and children, as it was expected from them? Were all of them equally successful? As for pressure and expectation – how free and powerful a man can feel if he is faced on a daily basis with a bitter spouse who complains that she expected a footman and a mare, and to keep open house,[50] something he promised and was supposed to provide? In a similarly set society, everyone pays a price. Men, as much as women, are (in)voluntary prey of the same ideology. It is hard to grasp how much more free they could be if they had to live with the fact that they were spending their life with someone who was with them out of dire necessity. And if the situation had been different, presumably they would not have married each other. This leads to what is probably the most significant moment related to gender in the play.

[49] These facts prove well-grounded Nora's and Rank's remarks to Kristine about office work in a bank being as difficult and the last thing she needs, considering how exhausted and weak she feels.

[50] In Fjelde's translation of *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda wants "a butler," "to live in society - (…) to keep a great house," and "a riding horse" (1978, 720-721),

6 CRITICISM AND META-CRITICISM IN *THE LADY FROM THE SEA*

6.1 Agency and individual responsibility

It has been argued that after the period of polemical plays, Ibsen in his late phase represented personal stories and individual cases. In *The Lady from the Sea*, a play which is usually seen as centered on the individual's (psychological or existential) crisis, his social criticism is however as vigorous as always. In order to approach the main scenes of critique of women's role in reinforcing traditional ideals, I shall begin with certain points from Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.

Mill underlines that men's power over women differs from the other forms of power since it is not, as many men would claim, imposed by force. They would rather think that "it is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it" (1989, 131). He cuts through such misperceptions: "In the first place, a great number of women do not accept it" (ibid.). Stressing the positive examples of women who began to claim equal rights, he poses one crucial question: "How many more women there are who *silently* [my emphasis] cherish similar aspirations, no one can possibly know…" (ibid.). Mill has definitely touched upon a problem that I consider extremely important in this play, although not sufficiently emphasized by scholarship.

The first hint of that criticism can be spotted in the conversation on Bolette's education. What stands out as a conspicuous aspect of the male-female relations in the nineteenth century is reverberated in her need of a mediation of a kind to see her ambitions through. Her plea for help is addressed to Arnholm; she asks an outsider, a male authority figure to intervene on her behalf. The irony is even starker, since it comes after Arnholm's instigation and encouragements to her to talk with Wangel and not consider her hopes of attending university lost:

> BOLETTE. (…) I suppose I was created to stay here in the pond.
> ARNHOLM. Not at all. It depends entirely on you.
> BOLETTE. [*animatedly*]. Do you think so?
> ARNHOLM. Yes, believe me. It lies absolutely in your own hands.
> BOLETTE. Oh, if only I really…! Would you put in a good word for me with Father? (73)

They are not talking about the same thing; in fact, Ellida's arrival interrupts a planned proposal on Arnholm's part in this fragment from Act III. What is presented here is the

insurmountable gap between a desire and its concrete realization. It shows that having the initial want, but lacking the will, setting an action in motion is endlessly delayed. The surrendering of her own agency and placing her future into man's hands reveals an obviously great trust that she has in Arnholm, which will come of no surprise considering how she confides in him. But it also demonstrates a very disheartening picture of women feeling free to stand up, speak for themselves and claim their rights, or better, in this case – to demand what was once promised to them. And certainly there is a price to be paid for this attitude, as Arnholm's actions testify. Instead of taking a direct approach in requesting her wishes to be acknowledged, just as Wangel tries to respect his wife's, Bolette asks the mediation of a man to negotiate her future.[51] He, on the other hand, makes little effort to talk with Wangel about her education. A reader gets clues about that development from the conversation between Arnholm and her father, after Wangel blames himself for taking Ellida away from her birthplace and "transplanting" her in his town:

> WANGEL. (...) I was so much in love with her. That's why I thought of myself first. How unforgivably selfish I was then!
> ARNHOLM. Hm! Every man is a little selfish in such circumstances. (92)

And he definitely proves to be so by telling Bolette that Wangel does not have the financial means to send her to university, a line that is nowhere actually stated in the play.[52]

The process of enacting laws that granted rights for women on equal basis was ongoing and strongly headed for a brighter future for them. However, without active participation and eager acceptance of rights and improvements by the actual beneficiaries, laws and processes would remain only empty words on paper. Many feminists, philosophers and historians concerned with women's rights, such as Mill, advance views that women were trained from early age to perform their future role of submissive wives and mothers. Assuming that we

[51] Templeton in *Ibsen's Women* brings out a similar point made by Ibsen. In 1884, when he and other Norwegian intellectuals were supposed to sign a petition in support of property rights for married women, he returned the petition to Bjørnson with the remark that the Storting ought not to ask for men's opinions: "To consult men in such a matter is like asking wolves if they desire better protection for the sheep" (1999, 127). See also Agerholt (1937), 142-143.

[52] The only analyses that I have encountered in which it is pointed at his lie is Elinor Fuchs's "Marriage, Metaphysics and *The Lady from the Sea* Problem," *Modern Drama* 33, no. 3, (1990): 434-444, which with slight modifications has been republished as "Counter-Stagings: Ibsen against the Grain" in *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 52-66. Orley I. Holtan's claims that "There is no absolute proof that Arnholm is lying, but neither is there firm evidence that he actually kept his promise and spoke to Wangel" (1970, 73-74). The other critics either do not refer to this moment or take Arnholm's claim for granted. If such conversation ever took place it was probably the morning after the Stranger's appearance or after Wangel's announcement that Ellida is leaving. The following line figures in the stage directions: "*He walks across to* WANGEL. *They talk quietly together over by the door*" (104). However, this would be a short time span to discuss a marriage with one highly distressed Wangel. In other words, in the actual text we do not read any conversation on the matter whatsoever.

only observe the phenomenon through the lens of Bolette's upbringing and societal pressure to accept a certain ready-made role, we again come up against a brick wall, since her sister has the same model, just as Bolette once had her mother as hers. Hilde's reaction is different – she is not particularly responsive to roles she does not like nor to convention and etiquette. I will refer to Hilde's character and attitude in greater detail further in my analysis.

This challenging complexity of women's condition can be observed in the dominance of the housewife-model in the Norwegian context. For the 1880s one might as well cast the blame on the judicial system, the lack of possibilities for education and of positive examples (family role-models and other successful women) who could present an alternative life to follow. In the twentieth century, however, many things changed. In addition to obtaining the necessary judicial support and laws to advance and grant their rights, women already had models of career women with professions within what were once considered traditionally male sectors, previously inaccessible. The puzzling paradoxical development, which Danielsen, Larsen, and Owesen point out, is the unyielding persistence of the traditionally dominant roles, even after the enacting of laws that gave women freedom:

> Å få formelle rettigheter til å delta i utdanning, arbeidsliv og politikk var én ting, reelle muligheter til å ta dem i bruk noe helt annet. Etter lang tids kamp for å få stemmerett kan det sees som et paradoks at husmorrollen ble et framtredende ideal for kvinner helt fram til 1970-årene. Først da begynte norske kvinner å ta i bruk rettighetene de hadde oppnådd. (2013, 20)

It would be true to claim that many women silently cherished desires for freedom, but we also have to take into consideration that the Norwegian context was (and to this day is) in many respects as contradictory as Bolette. As Myhre and others pointed out, gradually, as women were obtaining more and more legal and economic rights, the role of the housewife was no longer only a role; in the first decades of the twentieth century "homemaking" was raised up to the level of profession (husmoryrket) or ideology. In the country where in the late eighteenth century, women enjoyed far more freedom and rights than in the rest of Europe, as Mary Wollstonecraft claimed; from the 1890s onwards there were schools for housewives established. The ideal of the housewife was particularly strong among the middle classes and later among working-class women. Myhre elucidates that the housewife ideology was more dominant in Norway than in most Western countries. This development in a certain way continues the bourgeois woman's role in the household, with only one difference – women like Bolette were more akin to "house managers," in charge of the organization rather than performing the actual work, which was instead left to the maid(s) and servant(s) (2004, 134, 136).

Helge Rønning makes a lucid point on this conundrum: "There is a deep distrust in Ibsen for the possibilities of liberation within liberal society. (…) In describing the barriers to freedom, Ibsen considers that one of the most significant elements is to be found in the individual who does not wish to be liberated" (1997, 175). Does this mean that many women did not feel the necessity to break away from the so-called confinement, if "confinement" is the correct term to begin with? It is always a valid statement that you cannot liberate someone who does not want to be liberated, i.e. who does not consider her/his state as lacking of freedom or is fine with that condition. Freedom eventually signifies elimination of restraints, opening of possibilities and equal treatment of both genders, whether that leads to opting for a profession within fields traditionally considered as men's, or embracing a future as a housewife, rests upon the individual's choice and will.

Another problem for the nineteenth-century woman was her treatment as a young person, an adolescent, in any case not an adult. Legally, since 1869, both Norwegian men and women came of age at twenty-one. Since women were viewed upon as legal minors (or they came of age later than men), they needed a male guardian, a father or a husband.[53] However, regardless of his intentions, Arnholm treats Bolette as an adult – asks her questions, tries to find out her thoughts and feelings, in addition to encouraging her to take the matter of her university education into her hands. *It is Bolette who asks Arnholm* to negotiate her future, to stand up for her and her rights, just as Ellida constantly implores Wangel to save her from the Stranger's influence and from something she eventually admits lies inside of her. It is no wonder that in the last act he persistently denies to give her freedom to choose. Beauvoir and Irigaray rightly emphasize that, during certain ages and on some territories, women were objectified and commodified, exchanged between one man (the father) and another (the husband). Arnholm, upon noticing Lyngstrand's visits and conversations with the girls, with a conspicuous jealousy asks Wangel about it:

> ARNHOLM (*who has followed them with his eyes, turns to* WANGEL). Do you know very much about that young man?
> WANGEL. No, nothing.
> ARNHOLM. But are you happy about him seeing so much of your girls?
> WANGEL. Does he? I hadn't noticed.
> ARNHOLM. That's something I think you might keep an eye on.
> WANGEL. Yes, I'm sure you're right. But, good Lord! What's a man to do? The girls have become so used to looking after themselves. They won't listen to me, or to Ellida. (91)

[53] This echoes Wangel's occasional attitude towards Ellida, the way he calls her a "my poor sick child" (59), or that he should have guided her "more like a father," and helped her "to develop her intellectual interests" (92).

The father in this play is far from an authoritarian *pater familias*, as the dialogue shows. The daughters are independent, strong-willed and do not listen to him. As for the proposal rituals, here it is Arnholm who proposes directly to Bolette: "(…) I must speak openly and frankly to you (…)" (73), "But later today you and I must discuss these matters some more" (90), "We'll talk things over later, Bolette" (104). These are three postponed or interrupted attempts to propose, and as we can see he does not consult the father of the bride on the matter.

Sandra Saari observes that many of Ibsen's rebellious women who seek to break the patterns of the traditional gender role and become engaged in society like their male counterparts, soon become disillusioned, since the society which would embrace their activity has not been born yet: "If she rejects the traditional image of the 'ideal woman', (…) then most likely she finds no significant and challenging vocation open to her, and her strength and initiative reach a dead end" (1985, 37).[54] However, seen from the perspective of posterity, this is a very negative, albeit perceptive, reading of the plays. It connotes defeat and propagates inactivity on a great scale: if the society – the one that would integrate women's activity, allow their potentials to develop and offer them equal opportunities – was not born at that moment, what is the alternative supposed to be? If immediately after Nora leaves, she will find it impossible to become a bank's director or an academic, or be an equal before the law like any other man, is she supposed to stay in her marriage, no matter the consequences? Her leaving could be read as a symbolic-utopian gesture, a device intended to make a strong point; nonetheless a true utopia expects a change of conditions overnight, and without taking any action steps. It has to be acknowledged that the rights and benefits a woman enjoys in the twenty-first-century are laid on the foundations of many underpaid, exploited women of the working class, as well as on the ostracized and defiant women of the middle classes.

Lyngstrand on two occasions (to Bolette in Act IV and to Hilde in Act V) comments how amazing it would be for Bolette if she could think of him while he creates. Since she does not have any vocation in her own life, therefore daydreaming about him will be her vocation. And then cold-bloodedly admits to Hilde that he has no intention of marrying her:

> LYNGSTRAND. (...) And when I reach the point where I can, she'll be a bit too old for me then, I think.
> HILDE. And yet you've asked her to think about you?

[54] Saari makes her point in her analysis of Hedda's trapped existence: "Motherhood is not her vocation. Nor could she be a general, like her father. Nor, in that society, a professor like Tesman may become. Nor a respected political-sociological author, like Løvborg. Nor, lacking a proper vocation of her own, would she dream of becoming what Lyngstrand wanted, an inspiration to a man by her sitting and dreaming of him" (32).

> LYNGSTRAND. Yes, that can be of great assistance to me. As an artist, I mean. And it's something she can do very easily, since she hasn't any real vocation of her own. All the same, it's very nice of her. (116-117)

Not acting upon their rights and possibilities, women like Bolette risk absurd comments like Lyngstrand's, and ruthless treatment from inane individuals.

In "The Epistemology of Sociology," Lucien Goldmann states that society depends upon the agency (the praxis) of specific groups of people. Their actions and interplay will modify the world and create the necessary conditions for the new ground whereupon other subjects will act in the near future (1994, 82-83). William James is another who does not tire of emphasizing the initiative and action of great men in every society in order for a positive development to take place in that context. However, he sees this activity as a two-way street, the initiated processes are a consequence of the interaction between the individual genius and his/her environment; both are vital for leaps of progress:

> Thus social evolution is a resultant of the interaction of two wholly distinct factors – the individual, deriving his peculiar gifts from the play of the physiological and infra-social forces, but bearing all the power of initiative and origination in his hands; and, second, the social environment, with its power of adopting or rejecting both him and his gifts. Both factors are essential to change. The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community. (1979, 174)

To demand change and one's rights in the nineteenth century was what was needed, and not only from a few of its members. In spite of that, rebellion on a small scale is as important as the organized movements for women's rights. No matter how much we pity Nora or Mrs. Linde for their fewer possibilities, still it takes many door-slammings to obliterate what was a practice for centuries.

By this way I now arrive at the individual's responsibility and the implications of its avoidance. Because of the above-mentioned problems, great accent is placed on individual freedom of choice. Free will empowers in many respects, correcting the flaw many determinist philosophers are accused of, namely the questions regarding the agent's responsibility. If we adopt that outlook on human action, then women are excusable for their lack of vigor to claim legal rights and implement them. Taking the risk of sounding insensitive to the subtleties of history or not empathetic enough regarding women's deplorable condition, when one comes to reconsider how that subjugation was possible in the first place, can one blame for that development *only* men, the unjust repressive lawmakers and the society? This does not assert the contrary, that they prove excusable and innocent in the case or that they were accepting gladly the social changes. However, almost all of those men,

even in aristocratic families were raised and educated by women, their mothers or their nurses.

The problem of women's rights, mainly why it took so long to enact laws and make a progress on that plan is very complex and difficult to frame in black and white terms. When one reads the debate on the New Woman, some rather interesting moments emerge. For instance, Richardson and Willis mention the anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton for whom "the New Woman was anti-social – a wild woman who would bring the nation into disrepute" (2002, 12). They also refer to the author Marie Corelli whose work *The Sorrows of Satan* "features repeated attacks upon the apparently corrupting influence of New Woman fiction" (20). Cunningham as well mentions Lynn Linton and her famous article "The Girl of the Period" published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868:

> 'The girl of the period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face'; her inordinate regard for fashion leads her to 'strong, bold talk and freshness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty; to the desire of money before either love or happiness; to uselessness at home, dissatisfaction with the monotony of ordinary life, and horror of all useful work'. (1978, 8)

Another author, Sarah Ellis, considered a woman as an "agent of peace" or "second conscience" whose mission was to assist her husband stand against the "snares of the world around him, and temptation" (as quoted in Basch 1974, 8). The essayist Laura Marholm in her 1897 book, *The Psychology of Women* [*Till kvinnans psykologi*], is another advocate for the true bliss in woman's life: ''The best work which the woman can create, and in which her productivity is complete, undiminished and enduring, – is the child'' (as quoted in Stetz 2007, 162-163).[55] It hardly needs mentioning that the abovementioned persons, who nostalgically longed for the gentle, tame "angel in the house," were not men. And it is logical and worth positing again Mill's indirect question – how many more women there were who cherished similar ideals, no one can possibly know.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the first feminist writers emphasized that education and their writings would help awaken women's awareness of the necessity for change; that they were in the same way as men meriting education, financial independence and a life outside the private sphere of their homes. Bolette's case reveals the difficulty of making the quantum leap and passing from idea to *concrete* action. Although she never went to university, unlike what these authors point out, she is already conspicuously well-read and,

[55] Agerholt discusses Laura Marholm Hansson's and Ellen Key's problematic views on the topic. The influence of their writings and ideas was notable in Norway (1937, 172-176). The authors of *Norsk likestillingshistorie 1814-2013* remind us of Hulda Garborg, another partisan of the «forskjellsfeminisme» (2012, 141-142). I summarized Beauvoir's strong criticism on the matter in the Introduction. Additionally, see pp. 641-643.

more importantly, *aware that she has a duty to herself*: "I must think of myself too" (72), "But it isn't fair that I have to go on living here at home, is it? Actually, it does not help Father at all. And anyway I've a duty to myself, haven't I? (73). Nevertheless, that does not make her progressive or ready enough to make the actual steps. Bolette's passivity functions on two levels in the play. On an individual level, it is the cause behind her personal stagnancy. On a wider level, her inertia can be interpreted as criticism aiming to diagnose a possible source of women's deplorable condition in the subjugated. Or at least, it helps articulate how they oppress themselves when not acting upon their rights.

6.2 "Could have done otherwise" and alternative possibilities?

At a superficial glance, we could readily conclude that Bolette, and Ellida for the matter, were not free to choose. They needed sustenance and someone who would provide for them, which would subsequently lead to their marriages. If ideology is the set of norms convenient for the ruling class, and these norms are usually seen as oppressive or at least limiting for the subjects, what are we to make of the victims (the ruled over) and their enforcement of self-control and self-censorship – in this case, women following the rules? Are we supposed to blame only women for not breaking out of the patterns of patriarchal life? In the end, is this taking too strict a stance and imposing on women Brand's demands?[56] Both Bolette and Ellida are far from being superhuman heroines in Nietzschean terms. Isaiah Berlin rightly stresses the difficulties of the implementation of newly acquired liberties, a point that has to be taken into consideration:

> There is one further point which may be worth reiterating. It is important to discriminate between liberty and the conditions of its exercise. If a man is too poor or too ignorant or too feeble to make use of his legal rights, the liberty that these rights confer upon him is nothing to him, but it is not thereby annihilated. (1969, LIII)

However, in *The Lady from the Sea*, the problem Berlin touches upon does not seem to be obvious, since neither Bolette nor Ellida show that they are unconscious of their rights and the

[56] CROWD (*screams in fury*). Betrayed! You have betrayed us! You have tricked us!
BRAND. I have not betrayed or tricked you.
CROWD. You promised us a victory. Now you ask for sacrifice.
BRAND. I have promised you victory,
And I swear it shall be won through you.
But we who march in the first rank must fall.
CROWD. He wants us to die! To save people who haven't been born! (Ibsen 2000 [1986], 96)

other options they have. Bolette in her conversation with Arnholm in Act III, also gives hints that she is aware that she must think of her future:

> ARNHOLM. Well, so much the better if you were able to get away from here.
> BOLETTE. But I don't think I have the right to. Not and leave Father.
> ARNHOLM. But my dear Bolette, you'll have to some time. That's why I would say the sooner the better…
> BOLETTE. Yes, I suppose there's nothing else for it. I must think of myself too. Must try and find a place for myself somewhere else. When Father's gone, I've no one else. (72)

Although she does not decidedly specify what "to find a place for myself" means, since it might be moving to another town, marrying somebody, or finding a work to provide for herself, she implies that she knows her alternatives. Upon agreeing to marry him in Act V, Bolette's line which emanates a sense of relief additionally confirms my conclusion. She is put at ease that she will not have "stupid worries" about the future:

> BOLETTE [*quietly, deep in thought*]. Imagine! To be free… and to be able to travel. And not to have to worry about the future. Not to have these stupid worries about having to make ends meet…
> ARNHOLM. No, you needn't give such things another thought. And that's a good thing, don't you think Bolette? Eh?
> BOLETTE. Yes, it is indeed. You're quite right. (115)

On the other hand, one must also acknowledge the female protagonists' self-awareness and self-criticism in this text. Bolette admits that it is not only Wangel who is to be blamed for her studies. Ellida, also, in her description of her circumstances which made her accept Wangel's proposal, casts the blame on herself, not exclusively on her husband. Whereas he thought of acquiring himself a new wife (I doubt if that was his actual intention), her fault was her surrendering and acceptance of it. After bluntly pointing out that he "bought her," to his amazed wondering, she replies:

> ELLIDA. Oh, I wasn't a scrap better than you. I accepted your terms. I went and sold myself to you.
> WANGEL [*looks at her in pain*]. Ellida… can you really call it that?
> ELLIDA. Is there any other name for it? You couldn't bear the emptiness of your house any longer. You looked round for a new wife… (…)
> And I for my part… there I stood, helpless bewildered, and quite alone. It wasn't really surprising that I accepted… when you came along and offered to… provide for me for the rest of my life.
> WANGEL. I didn't consider I was offering to provide for you, Ellida my dear. I meant it honestly when I asked if you would like to share with me and the children the little I could call my own.

> ELLIDA. Yes, you did. All the same, I shouldn't have accepted! Never… Not at any price! I shouldn't have sold myself! Far better to have had the most menial of jobs, the most beggarly existence… of my own free will… and of my own choice! (98-99)

Ellida confirms that she should not have married Wangel and that every alternative would have been better than marriage under, what she considers, forced circumstances. It is remarkable how revealing her final sentence is; *she was aware that she had a choice*; that work for single, unprovided women *was* an option, even "the most menial of jobs" would have been better than succumbing to conformist worldviews and practice. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, an option of that sort was neither attractive nor easy, the *easiest* thing to do was to get married, and that is what she did. Seen from this angle, Ellida's view on her marriage seems rather contradictory; since, either she was forced to marry him or she knew her alternatives.

It is worth remarking that Bolette's situation is not exactly like Ellida's – the jobs available for unmarried women from the middle classes included positions such as teachers, clerks, telegraphers, shop assistants in fashion shops or bookstores. Teachers' salaries were not so high, and "the material standard of living among teachers in late nineteenth-century Norway did not match their social or cultural status," however they steadily rose (Myhre 2004, 243). The biggest injustice was that women were paid less for the same positions.[57]

Compatibilism does not negate previous causation, in this case, the insurmountable problem being biological determinism, social impositions and the (un)willing assimilation of prevailing ideologies and gender roles. Namely, from that perspective both of them *were free* to choose otherwise, since they did not have physical restrictions upon their freedom, and no one explicitly forced them to accept something they did not want. Mill in *On Liberty* underscores that even though it is undeniable that human beings need training and instruction during their upbringing, "it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way" (1989, 58). In a similar line of thinking with Sartre, he points out the necessity of the individual to discern for herself which parts and patterns of previous experience can be used and applied, in accordance to her character, to the present situation and circumstances. The person who blindly follows what is customary makes no choice, and "The traditions and customs of other people are, to a certain extent, evidence of what their experience has taught them…" (ibid., 58-59). I would add that there is nothing appealing in being eternal victim in an endless

[57] Beauvoir's conclusion is similar. She elucidates that many times employers preferred women to men because "They do better work for less pay" (2010, 132). This is the irony of the drama of women as a work force: "It is through labor that woman won her dignity as a human being; but it was a singularly difficult and slow conquest" (ibid., 132-133).

succession of events that lie outside one's power to change or control them. Women's sense of moral self-respect is related to genuine choices, whether that implies accomplishments through hardship, like Kristine Linde's case illustrates, or marrying someone. Beauvoir's emphasis on the individual's responsibility is worth reiterating: "there can be no liberation until women themselves cease to reproduce the power mechanisms that confine them to their place" (as quoted in Moi 1999, 285). There is still the important agency on a woman's side, namely, in a certain degree she is responsible for the process of the internalization of the dominant gender roles. If she negates to do it fully, like Hilde does in many of her actions, or decides to embrace some of them, like Bolette, there is still the woman-agent who decides (not) to do it.

7 THE MARRIAGE-MARKET, LOVE, AND TRUTH

7.1 Love – Unnecessary Luxury?

As I have already illustrated in the introduction, drawing upon the facts and figures from *Norsk likestillingshistorie 1814-2013*, Agerholt's study, and Camilla Collett's accounts, for most people in the nineteenth century marriage was a matter of reason; and in practice, both men and women ironically ended up as victims. Beauvoir, who discussed the situation in France and Europe until the first half of the twentieth century, writes that a marriage was "generally not based on love" (2010, 448). She additionally cites philosophers like Montaigne, Hegel, and Proudhon who saw other more important functions and features of the marital institution than love. During nineteenth century, she argues, along came the Romantics (together with Saint-Simon, Fourier, George Sand in France), who "had too intensely proclaimed the right to love" (ibid., 452-453). In England, authors like Thackeray and Elizabeth Barrett Browning denounced the economic considerations and the activity of the marriage-market. Barrett Browning viewed contractual marriages as legal prostitution and "could not find words harsh enough to condemn [them]" (Basch 1974, 27). In spite of that, Basch claims that those couples, for instance, Emily Winkworth and William Shaen or Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, who "opted for the romantic solution at a sacrifice to their standard of living" were a rare exception (ibid.). Camilla Collett was probably the first one in Norway who argued against this practice and emphasized that (women's) love and feelings, which she considered deeper than men's, should be taken into account when making a decision to marry (Agerholt 1937, 106).

I would like to address certain recurrent trends among criticism regarding the problem of love between the couple in question before proceeding with the analysis. Some, like Joan Templeton, make a connection between this and Ibsen's following "hellish bargain," namely Hedda's marriage with "another learned man" (1999, 203). Nonetheless, the financial aspects in the latter are not as discussed as in this subplot. It is rather puzzling why such emphasis is put on Bolette's case of coercion and "selling," and not so much on Hedda's, even though she clearly states that the reason behind her marrying Tesman are the years that were passing her by and her need of someone who would provide for her extravagant taste of a high-society lady. If the first married arguably to travel, the latter married to continue her luxurious life of a bourgeois woman. Pondering upon how married women were *not* given the right to work, did not have financial means at their disposition, so their husbands were the ones who took

the responsibility to provide for them, the logical implication that arises is that every woman sold herself, which neither critics nor historians dare claim.[58] What actually makes the difference between one case and another, and where can the red line be drawn? Templeton's criticism reveals an interesting point:

> Bolette's marriage of convenience differs sharply from those of earlier, more conventional Ibsen women. Penniless Margit, Svanhild, Helene Alving, and Bolette's own step-mother make marriages of convenience out of womanly duty. Bolette Wangel marries to educate herself. That Bolette's predecessors were expected to marry for financial security for themselves or for their families is unjust enough, but that Bolette, in order to achieve her dream of learning, must also marry a man she does not love seems even more heinous. (…) Bolette will have to share the bed of a man she views as a "decrepit specimen".[59] One cannot believe that the delights of the intellectual life will compensate for being Mrs. Arnholm. (1999, 200-201)

Where I locate the difficulty to accept Bolette's decision to "sell herself," unlike Nora's or others like her, lies in love and passion (although, I emphasize once again that I do not comprehend how different the case of Hedda might be). In other words, she does not love Arnholm and yet decides to marry him. Templeton's quote is a case in point: she stresses that Ellida and many others were forced to marry so that they could have at least their basic needs covered. Since Bolette does not have that problem at the time she accepts the proposal – she is neither alone nor helpless – therefore, her wish for knowledge and real life experiences remaining unfulfilled will not be the end of her. This eventually renders her character as more opportunistic than the rest who accepted the bargain for daily sustenance. It is even more shocking since the person who agrees to this marriage of convenience is not a silly, superficial woman interested in partying with the elite of her society; the marriage is supposed to bring her "the delights of intellectual life" (ibid.).[60]

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[58] Well, except for some outspoken feminist critics of the institution of marriage – Beauvoir and Olive Schreiner, just to name few. Schreiner's judgment is particularly damning: she equated the function of the wife and the mistress with parasitism and prostitution. The woman, in her view, "lives by the exercise of her sex function alone, (…) bears few or no children, and performs no other productive social labour… There is but one step further to the prostitute, who affects no form of productive labour, and who, in place of life, is recognized as producing disease and death" (as quoted in Ledger 1997, 41-42).

[59] The original, though, is a bit different: «Tror du *den halvgamle fyren* [my emphasis] er Arnholm!» (*HU*, 60). Arnholm is middle-aged, not exactly decrepit.

[60] Let me give Ibsen credit for not sparing the male "prostitutes": from Bernick and Engstrand to Borkman and Allmers, and the most notorious – the lawyer Stensgård – all of them are fashioned as emotional and/or sexual cripples, who either marry for money or to advance on the social ladder. Borkman even ends up being provided for by the same woman he left years ago for a higher position in the bank; whereas Allmers, the philosopher who writes about human responsibility, married Rita for her "gold and green forests". These cases of men marrying for money are even more deserving of condemnation, since society offered them more than it did to women. They had access to education and more freedom in choosing a profession, they were able to work and build a career, and/or they were their parents' heirs, and yet they decided to use other means to advance in life. In *The Wild Duck,* for instance, it is Gina who is doing all the work in the studio and at home, while Hjalmar hedonistically daydreams about his future inventions.

The general impression we are left with is that both Ellida and Bolette would not have made these choices, if it had not been for dire necessity. As a consequence, Toril Moi, for instance, expresses her doubts regarding the future of Bolette's marriage. "Arnholm is a man capable of using barely veiled threats to get his way," she writes. "Perhaps love, good will, and infinite patience can save this marriage; but (…) one has to question whether there is going to be enough love," Moi concludes (2006, 313). She views the message of the play as centered on the institution of marriage which can be transformed, only after women's socio-economic situation changes for the better. She further comments that "In 1888, then both Ibsen and Ellida realize that until marriage ceases to be women's only way of earning a living, it will never be a genuine choice" (314). For Moi, who reads Ellida's choice of Wangel in positive light, the *contrast* between the second *free* choice of Ellida and Bolette's *coerced* acceptance indicates that "even within sexist society there are degrees of freedom and degrees of responsibility" (ibid.). However, this seems a rather contradictory claim. If one follows Moi's line of reasoning, by choosing Wangel over the Stranger, Ellida is not socio-politically freer agent than she was years ago when she felt forced to get married. Not having a profession (way of earning) or independent financial means, she will continue to be dependent on her husband, whether the husband is Wangel or the Stranger. If I understand her interpretation well, this will signify that choice based on love makes a woman freer even though they all face the same (socio-political and economic) limitations.

Jørgen Dines Johansen takes a slightly different stance in discussing the aspect of power in a nineteenth-century marriage. According to his in-depth analysis, what women exchange (or should exchange) for material security are love and passion. In Chapter 5 I emphasized the pros and cons of both genders caught in the ideological grip. Similarly, Johansen argues that there are traps that await the male counterpart in the relationship: "their [men's] social, legal, and financial superiority becomes a problem because basically their spouses have not been free in choosing them" (40). From his point of view, the financial power men hold can be seen as countered to a certain measure by their spouses' sexual and emotional power: "in addition to access to the spouse's body, both Wangel and Arnholm crave emotional closeness and reciprocity in their marriages" (2007, 37), which their unwilling spouses who do not feel love for them will not be able to provide.

A marriage in which the partners are equal, free to choose each other and both invest love and eagerness into the relationship is something that the two parties deserve.[61] The

[61] This statement might sound rather naïve and innocent, since opportunism in marriage and love relationships has a long history. However, I also consider rather naïve to blame Bolette and state that she renounces love and passion, which

question that needs to be raised before I proceed to the second major part of the analysis is: what is the measure or threshold that has to be passed for a warm, tender, friendly affection to become love?[62] In spite of what traditional scholarly opinions are, I consider this issue of "love and passion" in the subplot, not to be so much of a problem.

More precisely, to stop at this point and leave this analysis as it has been presented means doing the text injustice. I find this subplot challenging and problematic and by no means easier to analyze than the main plot. A simple clear-cut approach, for instance to interpret the text only from a perspective of gender and social criticism, does not take into consideration some repetitive moments in the play. There lies the perplexing grey area that renders every serious analysis based only on the critique of the socio-political circumstances flawed and incomplete. Simultaneously, the incorporation of those aspects in a gendered analysis is even harder and presumably for that reason it has been so decidedly overlooked. Those lines to which I refer relate to the history behind the controversial proposal and regard Bolette's feelings for Arnholm.

First, what kind of feelings is the reader supposed to look for in the text when she clearly refuses him, saying a marriage with him is impossible, and that it all was an odd misunderstanding? Furthermore, upon her eventual acceptance, she expresses her joy not for marrying him, but for being able to study, travel, and not worry that life will pass her by or how she is going to survive. Nonetheless, in what follows I shall seek to investigate the other crucial and rather puzzling textual evidence in support of the possibility of freedom of decision. In order to proceed with that analysis, I consider indispensable a discussion of the function of another character in the play, namely her sister Hilde.

7.2 Spiteful rebel: Disclosure in *The Lady from the Sea*

Ibsen's works never lacked in bright women, one might recall Dina Dorf, Lona Hessel, Petra Stockmann, Rebekka West. However, the Wangel girls are, in my view, not only highly intelligent, but of the most perceptive wit in Ibsen's œuvre. Hilde's exceptional appeal is astounding, being only a minor character in *The Lady from the Sea*. Her remarks are

automatically presupposes that it is a normal practice for the rest of the population to marry out of love. No matter what kind of rights are given to both male and female, needless to say there still will be cases when love (whatever that notion might signify) is not the ultimate reason for the involvement. Even in our twenty-first century, an individual might choose to marry, live or stay with a partner because that is what everyone does, i.e. out of general custom, out of financial benefits, or out of the need to feel emotionally supported and to have somebody by their side… In fact – out of many things, but not necessarily out of (passionate) love.

[62] According to my personal criteria, Arnholm's "tender feelings" for Bolette, at least put in those terms, would not qualify as love either, yet for many they might be.

straightforward, sharp, even honest to the point of bluntness – an approach that she never renounces even when bordering on cruelty. Her tone is mockingly inquisitive and provocative, like when she addresses her older sister with "girl" or "madame". She steers the conversation in the direction she desires, constantly observes the other characters and knows exactly where to aim when dealing with them, or her uncanny intuition leads her to it. For instance, after Wangel revealed to Bolette the real prospects of Lyngstrand's condition, i.e. the death that awaits him, her comment is: "Did he really say that? Fancy, that's just what I suspected" (53). Most importantly, in addition to the fact that she easily penetrates hidden agendas, her outspoken nature gives her a notable dramatic function – to reveal the truth behind the actions of others. This functional quality can be also spotted in her lexical choices; it is remarkable how many times Hilde uses the imperatives "look!" and "see!" for the purpose of drawing attention to a significant action occurring. Her character has only been touched upon in scholarly studies. Therefore, in the interest of the analysis, in what follows I shall analyze some other instances where all the above mentioned features are present.

Immediately in Act I, her first line in the play directed to Lyngstrand and the choice of expressions reveal her character: "[*standing by the railing, and without returning his greeting*]. Bolette told me that you'd plucked up courage to come in today" (33). Hilde proceeds straightforwardly with the questions, which resemble detective interrogation, constantly interrupts him and hardly waits for Lyngstrand to ask her about the anniversary, which is supposed to be kept a secret. Paying no attention to her sister's warnings, she reveals that it is their mother's birthday (Bolette for her part lies to Ballested in the opening lines, instead stating that Arnholm's visit is the reason for the hoisting of the flag). After Bolette's murmuring reproach, Hilde dismisses both of them by telling her sister "Let me be," and afterwards by sending Lyngstrand home: "I suppose you'll be going back for some lunch now?" (34). When he leaves, she says half aloud: "Adieu, Monsieur! And please give my regards to Mrs. Jensen" (35).[63] When Bolette reproaches her that Lyngstrand might have heard her, her reply is "Think I care!" (ibid.). After Wangel's arrival and his roundabout inquiry if anybody else is at home, she immediately grasps whom he is asking about: "No, she's gone…" and leaves it to Bolette to smooth the awkwardness: "[*quickly interrupting*]

[63] Mrs. Jensen is the midwife in whose house Lyngstrand has taken lodging. Fjelde (1978): 385, Sandra Saari and Olav Solberg clarify Hilde's joke. Saari, who acknowledges Daniel Haakonsen for the suggestion, comments that midwives were unsuitable topic for a conversation: "(…) Hilde had played the role of an insulted young lady whose precious years were offended by Lyngstrand's socially indelicate 'jordmor' (1985, 30, 38). Similarly, Solberg states that: «Ordet *jordmor* assosierer nemleg til barn, fødslar, seksualitet – og dermed til eit av dei viktige borgarlege tabuområda, særleg for unge, ugifte kvinner» (1994, 238). However, since Hilde is not particularly prone assuming ladylike behavior, her playacting of being offended is an obvious teasing of Lyngstrand.

Mother's gone bathing" (ibid.). Ellida's discovery of the conspiratorial celebration and her subsequent pretense of not being hurt make Bolette to draw to Hilde's attention how nice their stepmother is after all. Hilde immediately corrects that perception: "Monkey tricks! She is only doing it to please Father" (51), which is not far from the truth.

Hilde in *The Lady from the Sea* is shown as rather reluctant to molding, and in an uncomfortable in-between position – she is no longer a child, she is an adolescent, nonetheless, she displays many of the characteristics that psychologists regularly attribute to a child's behavior, which are not necessarily seen as negative. In *The Fear of Freedom*, Fromm analyzes originality and spontaneity by emphasizing that many of our thoughts, feelings and wishes are not our own. He addresses children's feelings of "hostility and rebelliousness" which are eliminated early in the course of education with different methods, like "threats and punishments," or the "subtler ones - bribery or explanations" (2001, 209). Fromm writes that not just the *expression* of hostility, soon "the awareness of hostility and insincerity in others" is going to be suppressed (ibid.). Whether or not children *feel* negativity and dishonesty radiating from others, I would not claim, however it is rather important to note Fromm's emphasis that the contrary process is encouraged:

> the child is taught to have feelings that are not at all "his"; particularly is he taught to like people, to be uncritically friendly to them, and to smile. What education may not have accomplished is usually done by social pressure in later life. If you do not smile you are judged lacking in a "pleasing personality" – and you need to have a pleasing personality if you want to sell your services… (210)

In Hilde's case this translates into sincerity, without any restraint. She does not care what the others think of her or whether she may be offensive to them, since she herself believes that the *others* do not bother with her either. For the sake of propriety and certain peace in the Wangel household, Bolette calls Ellida "mother", although aware that the age difference between the two of them is insignificant for Ellida to be one. Hilde, for that matter, not only does not bother calling Ellida "mother," she does not even use her first name, Ellida, when the stepmother has to be brought up in a conversation. Using a name would imply a certain degree of intimacy, or at least would stand to indicate closeness between two people. Being hurt by Ellida's lack of interest in Wangel's family, and especially lack of interest and love *for her*, makes Hilde correspond with equal measure of coldness, detachment and spite. That attitude can been perceived in her use of the personal pronouns "she/her" when she makes reference to Ellida or even the name the town folk gave her, more precisely "the lady from the sea".

In Act II, without taking into consideration that the others are unable to keep pace with her, Hilde mercilessly rushes uphill: "(…) *comes quickly up the slope on the right, stops and looks back.*" (52). To Bolette's "But my dear girl, why do we have to run off and leave Lyngstrand," she replies "I can't bear going slowly uphill. Look, he's just crawling" (53). And again after the talk about his illness: "Look… Hans has managed to haul himself up" (ibid.). Both "haul" and "crawling" sound so brash, and in accordance with her highly colloquial idiolect. When he finally reaches them and attempts to catch his breath, she immediately jumps at him with interrogations. He tells her that he cannot dance due to his lungs, and after Bolette's warnings to not say a word to him, she makes a self-controlling pause in her question: "Because of this… weakness you say you have?" (54). "Weakness" is a term Lyngstrand uses; it is not, however, a word that she would use for a condition that leads to death. In continuation, while they are waiting for Wangel, Ellida and Arnholm, we are offered what is probably the strongest representation of her domineering attitude:

> HILDE [*looking down, right*]. There they come, down on the path.
> BOLETTE [*also looking down*]. As long as they know where to turn off. Oh, they're going the wrong way.
> LYNGSTRAND [*rising*]. I'll run down there to the turning and shout to them.
> HILDE. You'll have to shout very loud.
> BOLETTE. No, it's not worth it. You'll just make yourself tired again.
> LYNGSTRAND. Oh, going downhill's easy. [*He goes out, right.*]
> HILDE. Downhill, yes. [*Looking after him.*] He's even jumping. He forgets he's got to come all the way back up again. (54)

This is a highly suggestive image of her standing upright from the heights of the prospect looking down at him, whereas simultaneously being amazed by his lack of reasoning, even brainlessness, since it does not occur to him that he will have to climb right back after he has managed to climb up with great effort.[64] Bolette, on the other hand, does care if the others take the right way or if Lyngstrand tires himself. Many of Hilde's scenes involve Lyngstrand; her feelings for him, if any, are of a weird curiosity, a fascination with his imminent death. In my view, that fascination does not arise so much from a tendency towards morbid fantasies

[64] The play abounds in reality evaders, and the drama's male and female characters equally find certain outlets in evasion from their *situation*; Wangel's evasion is in drinking, Ellida's in the sea and the medicines Wangel gives her, Bolette's in reading and thinking about the great world. Hilde appears to be the only one at ease there, she is the only harsh realist, although as we can see already in this play, she is far from grounded. Whereas Ellida's mental and physical escape is horizontal – in the sea, Bolette's, in accordance with her character, is vague and indeterminate – somewhere and everywhere in the big world, Hilde's is vertical - to the heights, although that trait is shown only once in *The Lady from the Sea*, in this scene from Act II. In *The Master Builder*, we see her passion for climbing mountains and obsession with towers and heights, and, ultimately, castles in the air. In this text, her relation to height is delivered more subtly, with her bodily position and posture. In addition to this instance from Act II, we also see her standing up on the veranda, *looking down on* Lyngstrand, while he is *"standing below in the garden"* (33), or in the opening of Act III where both of them *look down on* the carp in the pond.

and death (not that I deny certain traits of it), it springs from her personal cult to blunt sincerity that finds amusement in observing the attitudes of those who live in their fantasy world of self-deception:

> Watching him while you get him to tell you that it isn't serious. And that he's going to go travelling abroad, and that he's going to be an artist. And there he goes believing every word, and this makes him utterly happy. Yet it can never be. Never. Because he won't live that long. I think that's such an exciting thought! (55)

Similarly, I partly locate Hilde's fantasies of being a young bride in black in her need to expose the hidden truths. In Act V, tempted to tell Lyngstrand about his fatal disease, she suddenly swerves the course of the conversation and makes it all about clothes and colors:

> HILDE. You think bright colors look well on me, then?
> LYNGSTRAND. Yes, to me they look lovely on you.
> HILDE. But tell me, as an artist, how would you think I would look in black?
> LYNGSTRAND. Black isn't really the thing for summer. Though I'm sure you would look marvelous in black, too. Particularly with looks like yours.
> HILDE [*lost in thought*]. In black right up to the neck… Lots of black frills… Black gloves… And a long black veil hanging down behind.
> LYNGSTRAND. If you dressed like that, Miss Hilde, I should wish I were a painter… And I'd paint you as a beautiful young widow in mourning.
> HILDE. Or as a young bride in mourning. (117-118)

One can hardly blame Hilde for this cruel teasing, rather a reader comes to love her because Lyngstrand got what he deserved. After demanding a pledge from Bolette to love him and think of him, he promptly rejects the idea of marrying her one day because she will be too old for him. Additionally, Hilde's keen perception is visible in almost all of her scenes; when she sees Ellida climbing up and talking with Arnholm, and not with Wangel, her conjecture is: "I'm wondering whether those two aren't a little bit sweet on each other" (56). After Bolette's outburst of moralizing, telling Hilde that she should be ashamed, since they are getting along well with Ellida, she replies with an eruption of bitterness and anger:

> Indeed? Don't you deceive yourself, my girl. Oh, no! I can't ever see us getting along with her! She isn't our kind. And we aren't hers. God knows why Father had to go and drag her into the house! It wouldn't surprise me if she went stark staring mad one of these fine days. (ibid.)

Even though Ellida does not have any feelings for Arnholm, nor does she go mad by the end of the play, Hilde certainly demonstrates that she possesses a rather disturbing sixth sense. Arnholm was involved with Ellida in the past, when he proposed to her, and Ellida's condition proves serious enough for her to become aware that she needs help. Hilde also

reveals one uncomfortable secret from the stepmother's past, namely that Ellida's mother was interned in an asylum.

Discussing some of the rebellious women in Ibsen's œuvre, particularly Lona, Petra, Rebekka and Hilde from *The Master Builder*, Gail Finney emphasizes their unconventionality as evidenced by their speech patterns, which are impregnated with colloquialisms and curse words, traditionally regarded as "unmentionable for young middle-class women" (1994, 93). Many of the characteristics Finney elucidates are recurrent in Hilde from this play. These female protagonists are portrayed through their "rejection of conventional masculine and feminine behavior," they display subversive "disdain for public opinion" and passion for "freedom from hypocrisy that often accompanies maintenance of status quo" (ibid.). They display liberating propensities to "unmask the lies which shadow the lives of other characters" (94-95).

Whether or not motivated by spite and hurt, not only are Hilde's reactions more truthful and authentic, she is more in touch with her feelings and does not make great efforts to smother them. Many critics consider Ellida's transformation and the play's ending as sudden, unconvincing and weak. However, even though such claims bear certain truth, it is worth pointing out that Ellida's "conversion" does not happen entirely in Act V. It starts earlier, and it has nothing to do with neither Wangel nor the Stranger. Although Wangel is letting her go with a heavy heart, his reaction is not as strong as Hilde's. Her way of expressing feelings is powerful and decisive. Whereas Bolette reacts in relatively normal, albeit surprised, tone that the inevitable has finally happened, Hilde jumps at Ellida:

> BOLETTE. Going away?
> ARNHOLM. Very sensible, Mrs. Wangel.
> WANGEL. Ellida wants to go home again. Home to the sea.
> HILDE [*with a spring in the direction of* ELLIDA]. Going away! Leaving us!
> ELLIDA [*frightened*]. But Hilde! What's the matter with you?
> HILDE [*composing herself*]. Oh, nothing. [*Half aloud as she turns away*.] Very well then! Go! (103-104)

In offering her the concept of "free will," we see the Stranger's huge influence over Ellida that she constantly reiterates in the text. This rather plain-looking man who does not resemble the daunting and menacing image she has created of him, with only few words is able to disturb her profoundly. After he leaves, it is all about "free will" for Ellida, and she realizes that her marriage was a business deal. Bolette's role in the scene is also significant. After she explains that Hilde has been longing for "One single loving word from you" (104), Ellida's reply is "Could *this* be where I am needed" (ibid.), whereas the stage description goes as

follows: *"She claps her hands to her head and stares straight ahead, motionless, as though torn by conflicting thoughts and feelings…"* (ibid.). Thus, I will suggest a reading of Hilde's action as a counterbalance to the influence of the Stranger, which makes her far more significant character than the critics (who suggest that the readers get bored by the subplots and all the additional characters) would claim. One outburst of Hilde in a form of mixture of anger, fear, disappointment and *love* did more than Wangel's two days of persuasion and attempts to protect Ellida, although his part in her staying is without doubt also important.

In the following chapter, I shall illustrate her role in Bolette and Arnholm's story.

8 GOING BEYOND THE PALE: NEGOTIATING LOVE IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY SOCIETY

8.1 The limits of (im)possibility

Ibsen is not particularly subtle in delivering this impending marriage as a "business deal". Upon such overt bargaining, Bolette delivers an even more blunt confession that marriage will free her of worry about the future and make travel and real-life experience a possibility (115). I have analyzed the most important aspects of that socio-political layer of the text. In what follows, I aim to dissect the other conversations (between Bolette and Hilde, Bolette and Lyngstrand) relevant for the couple in question.

Before proceeding, I would like to focus our attention on one perplexing fact. Upon closer examination, the difference between the sisters' personalities reveals itself as not so conspicuous after all. Whereas Hilde's statements and words are crude and stripped of any embellishment, Bolette's are wrapped in socially acceptable modes of expression. She is also highly perceptive in nature. For instance, she notices Hilde's fascination with Ellida; by telling Lyngstrand that nothing will come out of her promise to think of him, in a roundabout way she is attempting to hint at his impending death. Furthermore, the reader is shown her insight into the last crisis in her father's marriage, which I have discussed in Chapter 4, and her contemplation of the local people and their existence. All the qualities that define her as the responsible, compassionate and caring young woman that has been in charge of the household ever since her early adolescent years, in addition to being intellectually deep and more well-read than the average girl, will make her quite an eligible bachelorette, especially in a small town. Besides, when Arnholm points out bluntly the cruel reality in Act V, one can readily counterclaim that there are at least equal chances that she might find someone she deeply loves. In spite of her rather passive attitude, one cannot neglect the fact that she is remarkably intelligent, which escapes logic and is simply irreconcilable with the idea of her as an easily manipulated girl that falls into man's traps. All these nuances make one wonder if it is plausible to consider her so naïve.

In his thought-provoking and often quoted article "Meaning and Evidence in Ibsen's Drama," James McFarlane discusses, among other things, the "sign against sign" paradigm of representation in Ibsen:

> The reality of this dramatic world (…) is (…) a composite construction of signs: signs coexistent and signs successive, signs seemingly contradictory, often apparently irreconcilable, signs reliable and deceptive: 'tegn imot tegn'. (1966, 49-50)

The meta-theatrical "tegn imod tegn"[65] evidence serves to puzzle characters (Arnholm and Wangel) while interpreting intricate conditions (like Ellida's) and critics in their deciphering of the text. I have depicted several situations wherein Hilde's outspokenness and sharp-tongued manners demonstrate her attention to details and incisive perception. In what refers to Bolette's story, it is Hilde who first brings up her sister's feelings for Arnholm in the conversation. In Act II, while they are waiting for the others to climb up the hill, she starts testing her:

> HILDE. (…) [*Looks down the hill.]* At last! I doubt if Arnholm likes all this climbing. [*Turns*] Incidentally, do you know what I noticed about Arnholm at dinner?
> BOLETTE. Well?
> HILDE. D'you know… his hair's beginning to fall out. Here, on the top of his head.
> BOLETTE. Nonsense! I'm sure it isn't true.
> HILDE. Yes it is! And he's got wrinkles round his eyes. Heavens, Bolette, how on earth you could have had a crush on him when he was your tutor, I don't know!
> BOLETTE [*smiles*]. Yes, can you believe it? I remember I once wept bitter tears because he said he thought Bolette was an ugly name.
> HILDE. Imagine! [*Looks down the hill again.*] Just come and look! There's our Lady from the Sea talking to him. Not to Father. I'm wondering whether those two aren't a bit sweet on each other.
> BOLETTE. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You really ought! How can you stand there and say things like that about her. (55-56)

In this fragment the reader finds out about a certain crush which Bolette does not deny. However, she is avoiding a discussion on Arnholm's looks. Hilde then points to Arnholm and Ellida walking and talking together, probably eager to observe her sister's reaction. And Bolette reacts rather fiercely to defend *Ellida* of Hilde's insinuations. This reminder from the past of a crush does not necessarily have to mean anything for the present situation; it might as well simply be a memory of what once was. A "crush" is something that does not by definition last forever. And one can readily dismiss it as a typical red herring that Ibsen for some reason opted to insert in the text, presumably in order to mislead the reader. On the other hand, these short remarks have a foreshadowing function. They are first signal that something is going to happen in the course of the action, if the reader has failed to notice Arnholm's attentive gaze towards Bolette upon his arrival (37-38). Regarding the name issue, because of my non-Norwegian/Scandinavian background, it is quite difficult to determine

[65] This catchphrase appears twice in Ibsen's opus; it is enunciated by Julian in *Emperor and Galilean* and by Arnholm in *The Lady from the Sea.*

whether she was too sensitive and Arnholm inconsiderate, or her name was truly intended to sound plain. Authors who refer to Ibsen's choice of names do not comment on it.[66] However, when they climb the hill there is also some interesting action and thoughts:

> ELLIDA [*pointing to the background*]. It lies out there!
> ARNHOLM. Yes, that's right. It must be in that direction.
> ELLIDA. Out there is the sea.
> BOLETTE [*to* ARNHOLM]. Don't you think it's lovely up here?
> ARNHOLM. I think it's magnificent. Marvellous view.
> WANGEL. I don't suppose you've been up here before?
> ARNHOLM. No, never. In those days I don't think you could get to it. There wasn't even a path.
> WANGEL. Nor any of these amenities. It's all come about in the last few years.
> BOLETTE. The view from Lodskollen over there is even better.
> WANGEL. Shall we go there, Ellida?
> ELLIDA [*sitting down on a stone, right*]. Not for me, thank you. But you others go. I'll sit here in the meantime.
> WANGEL. And I'll stay with you. The girls can show Mr. Arnholm the way.
> BOLETTE. Do you feel like coming with us, Mr. Arnholm?
> ARNHOLM. Yes, I should like to. Is there a path up there too?
> BOLETTE. Oh, yes. A good broad path.
> HILDE. Broad enough for two people to walk it arm-in-arm quite comfortably.
> ARNHOLM [*jestingly*]. I wonder if you're right, Miss Hilde? [*To* BOLETTE.] Shall we try it to see it?
> BOLETTE [*suppressing a smile*]. Yes, let's. (56-57)

The text in this fragment does not explicitly state jealousy – however, I cannot help but notice that Bolette interrupts the conversation between Ellida and Arnholm. It is worth underscoring that this happens immediately after Hilde has asked her to come and see how Ellida is walking with him. As we can see, Hilde does not give way. By jumping into the conversation about the paths, she acts literally as a matchmaker for her sister, or at least one can draw a conclusion that she finds amusement in teasing both Bolette and Arnholm. Certainly, again one may claim that this does not necessarily have to mean anything; one could also overlook how Bolette is suppressing a smile in that scene and that Hilde helped her get Arnholm and separate him from Ellida. Hilde, however, does not stop at this point either. In the opening of Act III, she proceeds with her provocative comments to her sister. They are in the garden, by

[66] In *HIS* bd.8 *Innledninger og kommentarer,* however, its etymology and use in Norway have been pointed out: «Navnet var en del brukt på 1700-tallet, og tok seg ytterligere opp i første halvdelen av 1800-tallet. Fremgangen var størst på Sør-Østlandet. I Trøndelag og Nord-Norge stagnerte det tidlig og viser nedgang allerede i folketellingen 1865» (2009, 510). Therefore, we can deduce that it has been in disuse and presumably out of fashion. It is worth remembering that Ibsen gave permission to change the name for a German production of the play: "I am happy to accede to his request. Babette can therefore be used instead – assuming, of course, that Arnholm's remark about the name being ugly will not strike a German audience as inexplicable (467). For an interesting interpretation of the names of the male protagonists in *The Lady from the Sea*, see Fjelde's article "*The Lady from the Sea:* Ibsen's Positive World-view in a Topographic Figure," in *Modern Drama* 21 no. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978): 385. Toril Moi regularly refers to the protagonists' names in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (2006), 51-52, 162, 179, 260, 295, 363.

the pond, trying to catch some of the carp together with Lyngstrand when she notices Arnholm down the path coming to visit:

> HILDE. (…) Oh… Look who's coming! He'll frighten them away!
> BOLETTE [*looking up*]. Who's coming?
> HILDE. Your tutor, madame!
> BOLETTE. My…?
> HILDE. Yes. Heaven knows he's never been *mine*.[67] (69)

She surely knows how to tease her sister. This scene in Act III happens after a night spent walking, talking and dancing, when everyone went in couples. *The Lady from the Sea* abounds in apparently ordinary, but multilayered, sentences whose hidden meanings foreshadow later events. Arnholm is going to scare the tame fish that Hilde is luring to catch and get out of the carp pond. Similarly, she tries to make her sister think outside the box by constantly bringing out the blunt truth to her face. "He'll frighten them away!" can be taken as another *intuitively* strong statement. In the continuation of Act III Bolette reveals to Arnholm her observations about all of them being like the carp in the pond, and Arnholm in the proposal scene proves to, if not frighten – *viger tilbage i skræk*, at least astound one of those human "fish".

Nevertheless, even moments like these do not *conclusively* imply anything. If we carefully proceed further in the text to look for other references to the two of them, the task to apprehend what Bolette thinks of Arnholm *at the present time* is not rendered easier. In Act IV, where influence on women and shaping are being discussed, Lyngstrand's suspicion about the two of them triggers a series of answers from her:

> LYNGSTRAND. Are you fond of your old teacher, Miss Bolette?
> BOLETTE. Fond of him?
> LYNGSTRAND. Yes, I mean do you like him?
> BOLETTE. Oh yes, I do. He's a very good person to have as a friend and adviser. And he's always ready to help whenever he can.
> LYNGSTRAND. But isn't it strange he's never married?
> BOLETTE. Do you think it's so strange?
> LYNGSTRAND. Yes. Because they say he's quite well off.
> BOLETTE. He's certainly said to be. But it probably hasn't been easy for him to find somebody who would have him, I imagine.
> LYNGSTRAND. Why?
> BOLETTE. Well, practically all the young girls he knows have been his pupils. He says so himself.
> LYNGSTRAND. Well, what's wrong with that?
> BOLETTE. Good Lord, you don't marry somebody who's been your teacher! (89)

[67] Ibsen's emphasis.

The last line in this dialogue reveals conspicuously and in definite terms her general attitude towards Arnholm, namely that marrying him is an absolute negative. She ends with what Bjørn Tysdahl in his article "Ibsen: The Significance of Swear Words," denominates social swearing: "Men herre gud…" (*HU*, 118). Tysdahl mentions instances in which Bolette and Hilde use swear words (2006, 71). Unlike Hilde, whose idiolect is impregnated with colloquialisms and social swearing, Bolette makes use of swear words only few times, usually when talking to her sister, like for example in the case of "gud véd" which Tysdahl also mentions.[68]

This last intertextual exclamatory line carries approximately the same suggestive connotation that is expressed in yet another Ibsen's work, namely his next play. In a slightly modified form these are Judge Brack's words in the closing of *Hedda Gabler*: "But, good God Almighty… people don't do such things!"[69] (Ibsen 1966, 268). What we see in Bolette's and later also in Brack's line is an abrupt bewilderment in front of what, for them, can be considered as an aberration from a socially accepted *normal* behavior. Her use of a swear word in the presence of an *acquaintance* is another indication of that astonishment. And yet, paradoxically, both characters, Bolette and later Hedda, end up doing exactly what one simply does not do. In her worldview, having a "crush", or loving a tutor, is a matter of whim, a thing adolescents do, not something an adult person would do (89), or better – allow to do. This can be quite valid in some terms, although one can consequently ask how does one choose whom to love or when to begin and stop loving? That can happen, of course, if a person suppresses or suffocates feelings. We can certainly view this as an additional clue that being an adult at the present time, she no longer loves and cares for him. It is also worth noting the lack of stage instructions in the dialogue, so one is offered only bare lines, without obtaining insight into her emotional state.

Bolette's comments lead to another set of arguments that relate to the custom and norms in the nineteenth-century society. Interestingly, her worldview is not only framed by *external* social impositions, this also demonstrates how she internalized them and created new self-imposed constraints, according to her own moral compass, since neither Lyngstrand, nor Arnholm consider previous tutoring as an insurmountable obstacle for marriage. If it were

[68] In his master thesis *Erfaring og ironi: En studie i Ibsens Hedda Gabler*, Frode Helland argues that the play's action is set in a godless universe. This emerges not only as an overall impression of the play; it can be as well noticed in the excessive use of the expression "herre gud" (good Lord), which is never capitalized: «Dypt religiøse mennesker oppfatter fortsatt dette uttrykket som blasfemisk og forkastelig» (1992, 46).

[69] In spite of the same undertone, the original lines do not exactly contain the same choice of swear words: «Men, gud sig forbarme, - sligt noget *gør* man da ikke!» (*HU*, 393), whereas Bolette's line is: «Men, herre gud, man gifter sig da ikke med èn, som har været ens lærer!» (*HU*, 118).

socially unacceptable or morally outrageous, one might ask why Lyngstrand would show signs of presumable jealousy in regards with Arnholm's presence and even bother asking her about him. On the other hand, a reader may ask why Arnholm would come up with the idea of proposing in the first place, especially in view of the fact that, he shares her self-controlled civilized manners in some respects. This might indicate colliding gendered views on what is morally and socially accepted. She also supposes that it has not been easy for him to find a girl who would have him, since they all were ex-pupils. That is, however, her own supposition, even though she points out that "he says so himself" (unless Arnholm expressed similar opinion to her, which I highly doubt, since one does not make a comment of that kind to a person to whom he is planning to propose).

It is rather difficult to make a definite judgment on her comment or what an average person in the nineteenth-century European societies would say on the problem. In literature, the first one that comes to mind is Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* in which the protagonist marries her former tutor, whereas from the Norwegian literary context it is Camilla Collett who dealt with a similar theme in *The District Governor's Daughters*. Although Collett commented in a letter to Ibsen that she understands perfectly Ellida's blind attraction (*OI*, 469-470), it seems it did not occur to her that the play also makes an interesting parallel to her denouncement of marriages of convenience and a strong reference to the story of the protagonist Sofie and her tutor. Instead of marrying him, she ends up in a marriage with an older widower. Ibsen conflated both aspects in Arnholm and Wangel.[70]

In «Til forsvar for Bolette. Ekteskapsdebatten i Ibsens *Fruen fra havet*,» Beret Wicklund interprets Bolette's reluctance to marry Arnholm in terms of "her mental image of him" (2006, 83). Although Wicklund does not reveal her historical sources, she claims that marriages with tutors were not so rare: «Siden dette ikke var uvanlig for kvinner i borgerlige familier, der markedet var begrenset, må vi anta at Bolette anser et slikt giftermål som svært konvensjonelt» (ibid.). In this and in another article ("Gender Relations as Projections in *The Lady from the Sea*") Wicklund points out that it seems difficult for Bolette and Arnholm to go beyond these images of the other that "do not correspond to reality" (2007, 419). She stresses that Arnholm is a point of intersection of the role of the teacher and that of the father: "So when Bolette, a modern woman who wants equality, sees Arnholm as her teacher, – a father figure, she realizes that a father-daughter relation is not her idea of marriage" (ibid.). But then a question arises – how could she see him as an object of love as an adolescent and as a father

[70] For more on Collett's relation to Ibsen, see Kristin Ørjasæter's article "Mother, Wife and Role Model," *Ibsen Studies* 5, no. 1, (2005): 19-47. Joan Templeton also discusses Collett's importance for Ibsen's works. See *Ibsen's Women* (1999), 68-73.

figure when she is adult? This is a controversial stance, since it implies that as a student she is allowed to love him, since one loves a father figure, but not as an adult, when a marital/sexual relationship is expected. Although Wicklund does not explicitly write that, this stands to indicate that the ones who did marry a tutor were still stuck in that father-figure image, unnatural for an adult.

That Bolette openly shows love is nowhere stated. However, these moments are significant enough to be taken into consideration. If one recalls the theme of status quo and immobility analyzed in Chapter 4, perhaps that adolescent crush has not changed over time just like almost everything else has remained the same. There is a probability that she is still as fond of Arnholm as ever, just like she is "still just as fond of reading as ever" (70).

And thus we arrive at the final proposal scene – controversial, frequently discussed, but also permeated with obscure lines. To put it mildly, these lines sound odd, and pose more questions than allowing the reader to capture her own feelings clearly. Upon his proposal, she falls back a step in horror, which would mean that marriage is out of question. On the other hand, after her initial surprise and happiness for Arnholm's offer, she finds out that was intended as a proposal for marriage with someone with whom one simply does not marry, so the "horror" is understandable:

> BOLETTE [*half away from herself*]. No, no, no! *It's impossible! Absolutely impossible!*
> ARNHOLM. Do you find it so utterly impossible…?
> BOLETTE. But, Mr. Arnholm, *surely you can't mean what you say!* [*Looks at him*.] Or… was that what you meant… when you offered to do so much for me?
> ARNHOLM. You must listen to me, Bolette. Apparently this has come as rather a shock to you.
> BOLETTE. *A thing like this… from you… couldn't help but surprise me!*
> ARNHOLM. Perhaps you are right. Of course, you didn't know – how could you – that it was on your account I came here.
> BOLETTE. *You came here on my account!*
> ARNHOLM. Yes, I did, Bolette. Last spring I got a letter from your father. It contained a phrase or two that made me think… hm… that you remembered your one-time teacher with rather more than usual affection.
> BOLETTE. How could Father say a thing like that!
> (…)
> *I never dreamed that anything of the kind was possible.*
> ARNHOLM. But now that it has proved possible, what do you say, Bolette? Couldn't you agree to… well, to be my wife?
> BOLETTE. *But Mr. Arnholm, it seems too utterly impossible. A man who was once my tutor! I can't think of you ever being anything else to me.*[71]
> ARNHOLM. Well… if you really don't think you can… then let's keep our relationship as it is, my dear Bolette. (112-113)

[71] All emphases are mine.

It is rather ironic how many times Bolette actually uses "impossible" in this conversation. For most scholars, this means she does not love him and thus it is impossible for her to marry him. In my opinion, what her repeated use of "impossible" could mean is not sufficiently clarified. Impossible that he would propose to her, that he even had come up with the idea, or that he was thinking about marriage when he offered his help? The answer, whatever it might be, is by no means a decisive sign that she does not care for him. Furthermore, her tone is neither one of indifference or repulsion, as it should be when a woman does not share the feelings of her suitor; nor is it of someone who simply rejects an offer because she considers the man only in friendly terms. It is glaringly of astonishment and disbelief. Her main problem, in my view, arises from the fact that she never happened to consider him as a potential future husband.

I think indispensable discussing one more significant line in the dialogue, since it has been so far pointed as a clear sign of her true feelings:

> BOLETTE. How could Father say a thing like that!
> ARNHOLM. That wasn't what he meant to say. But I persuaded myself that here was a young girl sitting and waiting for me to come back. No, please don't interrupt me, Bolette my dear! And you know… when a man is past his first youth, a belief of that kind – or should it be illusion – is rather overwhelming. It made me feel… deeply grateful towards you… and tender. I felt I had to come and see you again. To tell you I shared those feeling I imagined you cherished for me.
> BOLETTE. But what now – now that you know this wasn't the case? That it was all a mistake? (112-113)

Bolette clarifies the misunderstanding with Arnholm with yet another ambiguous sentence – it is surprising the use of past tense in her reply, namely *wasn't* and *was* instead of the present *isn't/is*. She is in fact telling the truth in this fragment. When one articulates the sentence in a past perspective it refers to the fact that she was not thinking about him and was not waiting for him to come. Nevertheless, scholars take that sentence as proof that she *is* not in love with him, that she does not share those tender feelings he imagined she cherished. A sentence in present tense would have delivered that meaning; "Now that you know this isn't the case" would sound more convincing and illuminating of how she does not share those feelings for him *now*.

Lastly, one might again claim that this and the previous moments I illustrated do not necessarily have to mean anything. I, however, think that one encounters too many of those enigmatic moments, not to bear any meaning in a dramatic text.

8.2 Love or manipulations?

This analysis is not intended to paint Arnholm in an unrealistically positive light, since he lies to her that he discussed her studies with Wangel. Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with scholarly analyses that create an image of a manipulator viciously "persuading" and "luring" her into a marriage, due to the lack of convincing evidence for that.[72]

> ARNHOLM. Well… if you really don't think you can… then let's keep our relationship as it is, my dear Bolette.
> BOLETTE. What do you mean?
> ARNHOLM. Of course, I still stand by my offer. I shall see to it that you are able to get away from here and see something of the world. Learn something you are really interested in. Live secure and independent. I shall also provide for your future, Bolette. In me you will always have a good and loyal and trusty friend. I want you to know that!
> BOLETTE. Good heavens, Mr. Arnholm! All this is quite impossible now.
> ARNHOLM. Is that impossible too?
> BOLETTE. Of course, don't you see! After what you've just told me… and the answer I've given you… oh, surely you must see that I can't possibly accept all that from you. I can't accept anything from you. Not after this!
> ARNHOLM. Would you rather go on sitting here at home, and let life pass you by?
> BOLETTE. Oh, it's agonizing to think about it!
> ARNHOLM. Are you going to abandon all thoughts of seeing something of the world outside? Abandon all those things you say you sit here dreaming about? Knowing that life has so much to offer… yet never having any real contact with it? Think well, Bolette.
> BOLETTE. Yes, yes, Mr. Arnholm… there is a lot in what you say.
> ARNHOLM. And then… when your father is no longer here…. perhaps to be left alone and helpless in the world? Maybe even to have to give yourself to another man… someone perhaps you couldn't feel any affection for, either?
> BOLETTE. Oh, yes… I see well enough how true all this is… all that you say. Nevertheless… And yet perhaps…?
> ARNHOLM [*quickly*]. Well?
> BOLETTE [*looks uncertainly at him*]. Perhaps it's not so impossible after all. (113-114)

I have discussed in certain detail the layer of social critique of this conversation in chapter 5. Here I shall point out the other implications of this dialogue. The most problematic lines, in which Arnholm brings the alleged reality to Bolette's eyes, come after her refusal and his subsequent offer to help her as a friend. To me that persuasion seems an attempt to get her out

[72] One instance is Templeton's reading of his actions: "Arnholm has determined to have the young woman whether she wants him or not; her feelings do not matter to him, only her person. He coolly asks whether she would 'rather say here at home and watch life slipping away' than marry him and acquire the education she longs for, and then notes the Hobson's choice that will confront her after her father dies: she will either have to 'stand alone and helpless in the world" or marry another man for whom she "quite possibly – might also feel no affection'. Trapped, Bolette makes the bargain; if she can 'live in the world' and 'study anything' she wants, Arnholm can have her" (1999, 200). A reader should take into account Moi's interesting argument of Arnholm's word choice that serves the purpose of strategic manipulation (2006, 312). I, however, opt to read Arnholm's way of approaching the topic of marriage as marked by carefully pronounced, even stiff, phrases. Ibsen's letter of 16 November 1888 to Julius Hoffory states that "it takes... a very great familiarity with the Dano-Norwegian language to be able to detect (…) the slight touch of pedantry which can be now and again in some of Arnholm's phrases (Appendix I in *The Oxford Ibsen* 1966, 462).

of the place she calls the "fishpond".[73] His words sound harsh; however, he is not telling Bolette anything new, that she herself has not already taken into account and *told* him before. If a reader casts a closer look on their previous conversations in Act III, which I have already discussed, s/he reads a similar reflection made not by Arnholm, but by Bolette herself, which makes her far from *being made* aware and persuaded by him. She articulates her thoughts in a significantly analogous way: "Yes, I suppose there's nothing else for it. I must think of myself too. Must try and find a place for myself somewhere else. When Father's gone, I've no one else" (72). Additionally, it is she who tells him of her fears that life will pass her by and nothing will come out of her desires (111). In the final dialogue, he is simply reminding her of her own words and thoughts, something that is necessary, considering her faltering and indecisive behavior.

But, let us for a moment presume that she really is persuaded by Arnholm. Was it so unavoidably necessary to accept his offer of help by marrying him? Is it judging her actions from a modern perspective when one asks why not choose to travel with him and accept him as a friend?[74] As the years pass, if she sees her prospects of finding that "passionate love" become slim she can reconsider marrying him after all, if marriage with Arnholm is what she desires. Toril Moi's questions point in the same direction, namely: "Does Bolette freely choose to trade her body and her life for financial security, travel, and an education? What powers does she have to ensure that Arnholm keeps his part of the bargain?" (2006, 313). Would Bolette accept Arnholm's proposal without hesitation if he had not been her tutor? In almost all analyses the answer is negative, because she does not love him. I concur with the opinion that she would have refused the proposal. If she had been independent and earning her own living, she would *not* have married him since *he would not have had a reason to begin persuading her*. If she refuses his offer as a friend because the moral conventions deem it not right to take advantage of his generosity, then how ethical is to marry somebody for money and openly declare that to him? Is she too morally upright to do the first, and a moment later, in the second case, opportunistic and without scruples? Perhaps, considering some of her contradictory traits.

[73] Although I do not fully agree with all of his extrapolations, in Johansen's article this subtlety has not been disregarded: "in spite of her refusal, he offers her his friendship and renews the offer to let her travel and to secure her future. This means that, at that moment she is offered a *gift* [my emphasis], not a deal. She is, in a sense, free to choose independence. However, knowing his feelings for her, she cannot accept this offer, but neither can she give up the prospect of getting to know the world. At this point, it is *she* who replaces the offered gift with a deal, because she matches his offer of financial support by marrying him, although she does not reciprocate his feelings. She prefers to contract this marriage because otherwise she would be indebted to him, and she would feel that she was taking advantage of his love for her" (2007, 37).

[74] Olav Solberg points out that Bolette refuses his second offer (of a friend), and accepts marriage because she finds it impossible to travel with him unmarried. That way, according to Solberg, she «unngår å bryte med morlaske konvensjonar ved å reise ugift saman med Arnholm» (1994, 239, 242).

One might certainly doubt Arnholm's motives behind that friendly offer, insinuating that he might expect his feelings to get corresponded in the future, or that she might come to love him and marry him eventually after considering his selfless, generous help. However, I find this highly improbable since in Act I he claims that he cut communication with Ellida after the proposal for fear of being judged as wanting to try his luck again. To Ellida's question why he did not write to her, he replies: "I? Take the first step? And perhaps create the impression that I wanted to go over the whole thing again. After the rebuff I'd already had?" (42). He also tells her that he did not marry because he had been faithful to his memories (ibid.). Janet Garton's "The middle plays" touches upon some of these issues:

> Arnholm has come to find a wife, in the mistaken belief that Bolette has formed a romantic attachment to him; and even when he discovers his mistake, he still persists. Her eventual agreement to marry him has ominous overtones if the 'trade agreement' between Ellida and Wangel years before. She, like Ellida, has no prospects if she stays at home, and he is effectively buying her with a promise to take her abroad to see the world. The deal is put in crass terms: her instinctive reaction to his proposal is to 'recoil in horror' [vii, 112], after which he loses no time in telling her that her fate will otherwise be to let life pass her by, be left alone and helpless when her father dies and then perhaps be forced to marry anyway, just to stay alive. (In a recent Oslo production of the play this message was driven home by having Arnholm actually strip her at the end of the scene, to look at what he had just bought – which is surely to sacrifice credibility to explicitness, but the implication is nevertheless there.) (1994, 119)

In my view, if she had been an egotistical opportunist, she would have accepted his second financial offer, taken the money and pursued her own interests. Was *this* husband, for such a fortune-hunter, a necessity? On the other hand, if Arnholm had really been determined to provide for himself a wife at any cost, he would have gotten married earlier. Therefore, the only thing Bolette needs "stripped" away is her character's image of a silly, naïve victim or the image of a sinner against love and the sanctity of marriage.

The following segment has also been pointed out as a proof of her reluctance to marry him:

> BOLETTE [*looks uncertainly at him*]. Perhaps it's not so impossible after all.
> ARNHOLM. What Bolette?
> BOLETTE. That it might be feasible… to do… what you suggested.
> ARNHOLM. You mean you might be ready after all…? That you would at least give me the pleasure of being able to help you as a loyal friend?
> BOLETTE. No, no, no! Never that! That would be absolutely impossible now. No, Mr. Arnholm… Rather take me.
> ARNHOLM. Bolette! You mean it?
> BOLETTE. Yes… I think… I do.
> ARNHOLM. You will be my wife?
> BOLETTE. Yes. If you still think… you want to have me.

ARNHOLM. If I still think...! [*Seizes her hand*]... (114)

Bolette's refrain from using the term 'marriage' points to her odd feelings in regard to marrying her former tutor, namely she formulates her acceptance by indirect hinting: "Perhaps it's not so impossible after all. (…) it might be feasible… to do… what you suggested" (ibid.). The expressions she uses in the end, "Rather take me", "If you still think… you want to have me" (ibid.) signify a distance – they do not contain any agency on her side, or rather they once again point at a possible awkwardness of the situation. It is *Arnholm* that is meant to take her, if *he* wants her.

Lastly, it is once again Hilde who, observing them from a distance says that she could almost swear that Arnholm is proposing to her sister (116), a problematic line that I have discussed in the Introduction. As an answer to Lyngstrand's question if she has noticed something, she answers that "It's not difficult… if you keep your eyes open" (ibid.). Hilde also hints at her sister's ambiguous stand regarding Arnholm's strained appearance. Bolette's first reaction, failing to recognize him, is of apparent disbelief. She laughs at Hilde's and Wangel's indications that it must be him coming:

HILDE [*about to go through the garden, left, with the bag, but stops, turns and points*]. Look, somebody's coming. It must be Mr. Arnholm.
BOLETTE [*looks in that direction*]. Him? [*Laughs.*] Don't be funny! That ancient thing Arnholm?
WANGEL. Wait a moment, child. Actually, I do believe it is him!... Yes, it is!
BOLETTE [*stares in quiet amazement*]. Good Heavens, I do believe he's right...! (36)

And it is because of this comment – which could not have escaped Hilde's notice – that she makes the provocative remark about his hair falling out and the wrinkles around his eyes, as discussed above. Bolette's insincere reply to this is "Nonsense! I'm sure it isn't true" (55). It is also interesting to underscore how promptly she reacts to avoid any distressing allusions to his looks. In the proposal scene, after his first offer to help her, she is rather quick to correct herself while verbally accepting help: "Yes of course! Why not? What else? Are you not my old teacher… I mean, you were my teacher in the old days?" (112). Still, she is not the only one who is bothered by his appearance and the age difference; it is Arnholm who first makes the abovementioned mistake: "Don't you think you might bring yourself to accept a little help from your old… I mean, from your former tutor?" (110). Johansen explains her refusal as a result of the age difference between the two of them and the terms of their past relation (2007, 36-37), whereas in *Henrik Ibsens metode*, Jørgen Haugan points out that she cannot recognize her past infatuation with him. Bolette «gjemmer på et gammelt svermeri for sin lærer, men nå,

konfrontert med den halvskallede, eldre mann, kan hun ikke identifisere ham med gjenstanden for sin ungdommelige lengsel» (1977, 263). In both analyses it is being stated that she does not have any feelings for him now. The text however tells us that he is thirty-seven and that he looks strained «*Han har et noget overanstrængt udseende*» (*HU*, 61).[75] I would also add that the false images they carry of each other, do not refer to the present situation – Arnholm was a teacher years ago, when he was in his late twenties and that is how he has remained in her thoughts; whereas, although he does not see her as she was – a former student, he still keeps the false image of her waiting for him.

Finally, one last objection has to be met, i.e. her "unwillingness" to announce the engagement that has been mentioned by Toril Moi (2006, 313) and Joan Templeton:

> Like the reluctant Svanhild in *Love's Comedy*, who puts off her wedding date, Bolette asks her intended not to announce their engagement. Bolette's novel marriage of convenience – trading herself for self-development – is a contradictory bargain that seems as doomed to failure as those of her more conventional predecessors. (Templeton 1999, 201)

This seems a valid remark that also needs to be taken into consideration. However, the *tegn imod tegn* lexical structure of the text proves unyielding; the situation in that scene is not so indisputable. By asking Arnholm to release her from his embrace, she does not express her preference to keep it a secret from the rest of the family. She does so because it is Hilde who is coming with Lyngstrand. Since Bolette, in an act of compassion, promises to think of him and thus function as a muse/inspiration for the young artist, even this supposed "reluctance" is not so clear. She even points out to Arnholm that is that sculptor that is coming and this is the reason she would rather not be seen by both of them.

In this analysis, I, by no means, attempt to diminish the harsh undertone of her final reflection. Arnholm's ecstatic enthusiasm leads him to exclaim:

> ARNHOLM. Thank you! Thank you, Bolette! All those other things you said… all your earlier doubts… I shan't let them put me off. Even if I have not completely won your heart yet I shall find a way to do it. Oh, Bolette, how tenderly I shall care for you!
> BOLETTE. And I shall see something of the world. I shall live! You promised me.
> ARNHOLM. I will keep my promise. (114)

While he is hoping for his love to be reciprocated one day, Bolette's thoughts are fixated on how finally her dream will be fulfilled.[76] Not to mention her atypical *bluntness* in the

[75] In one of his letters, Ibsen emphasized the text's stage instruction: "Herr Hansson must not be misled by 'Bolette's' and 'Hilde's' remarks about his appearance into portraying 'Arnholm' as a really old or decrepit man. It is only to these young girls that he appears so. His hair has grown somewhat thin, and schoolmastering has taken it out of him – that is all" (465).

[76] Several commentators, among whom Haugan (1977), 264; Rekdal (2000), 216-217, 224, and Hemmer, read this ending as a dramatic irony. Hemmer points out that Arnholm will provide a certain (financial) freedom for Bolette, yet the character

confession how good it will be “not to have to worry about the future” and how “to make ends meet” (115). We hear this recognition from somebody who constantly tells Hilde to mind her manners and behavior, to be careful what she is saying and revealing. In fact, these lines are too obviously open, not to raise any suspicion about their emphasis, or better, about their defocusing. Additionally, I highly doubt that she could express any other feelings after her initial no and so many “impossible-s” she articulated.

Johansen lucidly points out “that men are no better off than women” in this play. He discusses the sexual aspect of the power games in a relationship in which women avail themselves of “passive resistance” (2007, 40). Arnholm’s strategy of “eternal courtship” is the only thing left to men: “the lack of emotional and sexual responsiveness on the part of the women hurts the men precisely where they are most vulnerable” (ibid.). This is an insightful commentary on the male-female power struggle. I shall seek to raise a similar question focused on the emotional power aspect in a relationship. Seen from the perspective of love and passionate attachment, the one who has the power in a relationship is the one who loves less. What Arnholm, with his insistence unknowingly does, is to make it easier for her to accept him – we see one surprised and “reluctant” Bolette, who repeated several times “it’s impossible” and “how could Father say a thing like that?” and one overwhelmingly thankful suitor, happy for managing to change her mind and have her as a wife. Taking into account all said and analyzed in this and in the previous chapter, I would go as far as to suggest that, compared to his “tender feelings,” it might easily turn out that she presumably loves him more than he loves her. Only, she does not show that, nor does she say anything on the matter, while he, unaware, hopes to win her over.

Shortly, eight-nine years passed, by odd misunderstanding, she who thought that she would never see any midnight sun gets him and the wish for education, travel and marriage fulfilled. Yet, it is *he* who is grateful, it is *he* who is offering trust, security, promising to provide for her and who will carry her in his arms.

For a “tragic” heroine of a “dark drama” – extremely well played.

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of that freedom can turn out to be quite ambivalent: «Tilærelsen sammen med en skolelærer som allerede i 37-årsalderen er noe overanstrengt, kan lett komme til å bli et temmelig grått og sterkt redusert «frihetsliv». Bolette uttalte drøm om å vite seg *fri* og ha mulighet til å følge sin lengsel mot det fremmede, kan derfor synes å ha en ganske ironisk undertone» (2003, 380).

9 REPETITIONS AND PARALLELS: DECONSTRUCTING FAMILIAR STRANGERS

Now that my examination of the subplot's main themes has been concluded, in this last chapter of the analysis, I shall seek to discuss some of the play's repetitions in an attempt to achieve a different reading of the framing. The recurrent parallels between the main plot and the subplot are regularly stressed in scholarly criticism. Lis Møller, who follows McFarlane's line of reasoning, investigated the repetition pattern in Ibsen's major prose plays. She points out the ambiguous nature of it:

> Repetition semioticises. Repetition creates meaningful signs and symbols. But at the same time the repetition in Ibsen's prose plays produces a 'signs against signs'-structure, where we can no longer decide what status and function repetition has, even though the interpretation of the entire drama is dependent on this decision. (2001, 24)

In this play the "meaningful signs and symbols" have a dual function. Retrospectively, they give us clues about Ellida's past by letting Bolette repeat a similar pattern, and prospectively, they stand to indicate a possible aftermath of the step-daughter's marriage. Thus the opinions pronounced regarding the impending marriage are mostly negative, with Asbjørn Aarseth being one of the few scholars who refrains himself from drawing conclusions about Bolette's choice with terminology from the economic science. In his article "The Greenhouse, the Zoo and the Aquarium: Allegories of Inauthenticity in Ibsen's Modern Drama,"[77] he views her future prospects in more positive terms. One should also take into consideration that the text is open regarding her impending marriage. From his perspective, in spite of the constant emphasizing of the similarities between the plot and the subplot in scholarship, there are also significant dissimilarities that should be attended to. He first refers to the moment that Bolette embraces marriage "with open eyes" and without any "past commitment," unlike Ellida's to the Stranger. Moreover, whereas Ellida, attached to her birthplace near the sea, seems to identify significantly with it, Bolette detests her life in the small community. Taking all of this into account, Aarseth infers that Bolette's future looks better than Ellida's when she married Wangel (2004, 76).

I convene in that respect with him. No matter how much parallelism may be drawn from the text, no repetition can ever be equal to the original – if certain similar traits are

[77] Aarseth's article is a synthetized English version of some of his main ideas further developed in *Ibsens samtidsskuespill: En studie I glasskapets dramaturgi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999). The chapter on *The Lady from the Sea*, is called «Akklimatiseringens nødvendighet», 179-215.

detectable in both cases, the same claim can be made in support of the contrary. Upon considering the parting situation of both female characters, the conclusion might take us in significantly different directions. First, in view of the class distinctions, Bolette, as I already pointed out, is a doctor's daughter and her condition is different from Ellida's. Her financial background is conspicuously more favorable than her stepmother's was. Taking the context into account, even if she supposedly did not marry, together with Hilde, she would still have the possibility to rightfully obtain a share of their father's inheritance. What appeared to be a voluntary act, upon the Stranger's arrival, Ellida came to realize was of a completely different character. Bolette's apparent "trade agreement" may turn out not to be so. In addition, unlike Ellida and Wangel, she and Arnholm as a couple do not incur a risk of having conspicuously dissimilar personalities. They share common worldviews. Like her (and unlike Hilde), he is more socially adjusted. For instance, upon Lyngstrand's misinterpretation of the birthday celebration, Arnholm keeps the act up for the sake of smoothing the awkward situation. He is a careful listener. He remembers Ellida's birthday, knows her affinity for the sea, and certainly remembers many moments from Bolette's past. Anholm's perception is subtle enough to be surprised by Ellida's marriage, since he knows how different she and her husband are. He is a realist – he does not believe Lyngstrand's story about the sailor's revenge, and proves to be more down-to-earth than many of the characters (Hilde, Ellida or Lyngstrand). This feature can also be noted in his preference to stay on dry land. One may wonder if a realist could provide Bolette with what she wants. However, perhaps to expect freedom from a more sensible and reliable person, can lead to achieving what one wants in a nineteenth-century society, unlike the extreme, imposing demands for freedom made by an amoral and antisocial character like the Stranger. In my view, there is a very little evidence that Arnholm will turn out to be a bad husband that will mistreat Bolette or that he might retract the promises made to her.

To keep the discussion solely on this level is to do a rather rough analysis. This text is replete with repetitions that are not necessarily thematic parallels between the two couples' stories. The next three examples witness to that tendency. Bolette's change of heart and her demand to take her (…) "If you still think… you want to have me" (114) / «Ja. Hvis De endnu synes, at – at De bør ta' mig» (*HU*, 146), is reflected again in Act V, moments later. Ellida announces her stay with the family by confirming to Hilde: "Yes, Hilde my dear… if you'll have me" (123) / «Ja, kære Hilde, – ifald du vil ha' mig» (*HU*, 156). A slight suggestion of repentance lies in those lines, relating to the perplexity they both express when confronted with, respectively, Arnholm's and Hilde's feelings of love towards them. And even the

answers are remarkably similar: Hilde thrilled says: "Oh, if I'll have her, she says!" (123) / «Åh, – tænk – om jeg vil –!» (*HU*, 156), whereas Arnholm, as well ecstatic, exclaims: «Om jeg synes – !» (*HU*, 146) / "If I still think…!" (114).

The parallels do not cease here. Strikingly enough, Arnholm's words that he will find a way to win Bolette's heart (114) «Har jeg end ikke fuldt ud Deres hjerte nu, så skal jeg nok vide at vinde det» (*HU*, 146) bear resemblance to Ellida's desire to become a mother to her [Wangel's] girls: "Not really mine. But I shall win them" (123) / «Dem, som jeg ikke ejer, – men som jeg nok skal vinde» (*HU*, 155). It is worth reiterating that Ellida, just like Arnholm, does not have to win them over. She already has Hilde's affection and Bolette's acceptance, she has already won them.

Regarding the main purpose of this chapter, if one takes the framing scene of Act I, one could be surprised to find many interesting clues that can present another interpretation of the events. As much as it is about marriage, free choice and communication, this play is about the strange, the remote and the unknown. It is about the foreign, the alien, the non-adapted and the different. And some of the repetitions in question are related to this theme. In the opening scene, the flag is being hoisted in a festive atmosphere:

> BOLETTE. Well, Ballested, can you get it to work?
> BALLESTED. Oh yes, Miss Bolette. It's easily done. Do you mind telling me – are you expecting visitors today?
> BOLETTE. Yes, we are expecting Mr. Arnholm this morning. He arrived in town last night.
> BALLESTED. Arnholm? Wait a moment! Wasn't the man who was tutor here a few years ago called Arnholm?
> BOLETTE. Yes, that's him.
> BALLESTED. Well, well. So he's back in these parts again.
> BOLETTE. That's why we want to hoist the flag. (29)

One of the first lines in the text is Ballested's «venter De fremmede på besøg idag?». Bolette's answer is: «Ja, vi venter overlærer Arnholm hid til os i formiddag» (1999, 53). Thus, Arnholm's appearance in the play echoes the Stranger's, a link impossible to be spotted in the English translations of the play.[78] For Brian Johnston this opening marks a leitmotif of the play, and an indication that *fremmed(e)* in the "language of the play can admit two meanings, a friend and a stranger. And the other Stranger is, at this moment, on his way to the

[78] In every English translation that I have checked (McFarlane, Meyer, Marx-Aveling, Fjelde, Watts, Archer, McLeish, Unwin, McGuinness) *fremmede* from Ballested's line is rendered as *visitors*.

Wangel's house as his ship approaches the little community" (1989, 207-208). The friend is supposed to be Arnholm.[79]

Nonetheless, the announcement of the visitors/strangers as a foreshadowing of the Stranger's appearance can be, in a certain way, interpreted as a red herring. Although it certainly alludes to him, it also misleads the reader from the other strangers in the narrative. This play seems permeated with travel, movement, moving in and away, and most importantly: nonnative/nonlocal characters, i.e. «*fremmede*»: Ballested (who came with a theater company years ago), Lyngstrand (another visitor like the tourists), Ellida (from Skjoldviken), Arnholm (who presumably lives in the capital) and the Stranger who is the sea's citizen. I would go as far as to suggest that Wangel is probably the only native/local there:

> ARNHOLM. (…) But now, what about yourself, my dear Doctor? Are you settled here for life?
> WANGEL. Oh yes, I should think so. I was born and bred here, as they say. And we were so happy here, she and I, you know… before her ultimate departure. You knew her of course when you were here before, Arnholm. (38)

His daughters, Hilde and Bolette are rather ambiguous towards the local and the strange. For Hilde, the unknown is *spennende*, it is mysterious and fascinating and she also acts rather at ease around it. Bolette's feeling is ambivalent; she gives the appearance of well-adjusted to the native land, simultaneously her relation with the distant and unknown («*den store fremmede verden*») is through longing. She desires it as strongly as Ellida does: «Hvad nytter det os, at den store fremmede verden kommer her forbi for at rejse op og se på midnatssolen? Vi selv får jo ikke være med på det» (*HU*, 98) and after the acceptance of the proposal she dreams «Tænk, – at vide sig fri – og få komme ud i det fremmede» (ibid., 146).

Arnholm is also one of those strangers/visitors who are passing by on their way to the midnight sun, although in this case he was not exactly headed there. Unlike Johnston who detects two implications of *fremmed*, an opposition between *fremmed* as friend/visitor (Arnholm) and *fremmed* as unknown (the Stranger), I see the two arguably antithetical meanings merging in Arnholm. Bolette's uncertainty whether she could accept his financial help: «kan jeg ta' imod sligt et offer af noget fremmed menneske?» also frames him as both. For Des Roches these references are ironic since den *store fremmede verden* that passes by "leaves the townspeople with nothing" and "has left her with unrealizable longings that make

[79] Johnston's point about the connotation of the term *fremmed,* seen as friend/acquaintance and stranger, is argued also by Rekdal, who stresses the deliberate ambiguity of this and other moments in the play's opening. See *Frihetens dilemma* (2000), 188-190.

her vulnerable to temptation" (1987, 316-317). However, as I stated, Arnholm arrives with the determination to take her away and to see *her*, not the midnight sun, so I would not read so much irony in it. Interestingly, when Arnholm and the Stranger attempt to fetch, respectively, Bolette and Ellida, the latter's reaction is one of fear. In Act III, when the Stranger makes his long-awaited appearance in Wangel's garden and tells Ellida "You know I've come to fetch you," Ellida "*recoils in terror*" (77), whereas Bolette "*falls back a step in horror*" when Arnholm asks her to tie herself to him for life (112). Arnholm is, certainly, far from the highly romanticized Nietzschean image of the Stranger. His approach is more moderate and considerate. Nevertheless, just like the Stranger, he demands a prompt decision from Bolette. Trying to take her away from the carp pond by pointing out to her what happens to most of the girls, he ends with: "Think well, Bolette" (114). "Think carefully what you are doing" (81) is what the Stranger tells Ellida in Act III, when he as well offers her to join him and travel the world.[80]

Johnston, on the other hand, mentions the assonance and alliteration in *fremfærd* (to have initiative/will) and *fremmed(e)*. He delivers the meaning of the Norwegian term as "will," or "implying the taking of a step forward" and notes that Wangel's "lack of [*fremfærd* (fremferd)]" holds his daughter bound to his home. Thus, the Stranger, in opposition to Wangel, "is associated with the Will and its capacity for decisive choice" (1989, 215). Johnston further elucidates that in certain aspects Arnholm "does represent for Bolette an unknown world, yet to be explored, a future of possibilities denied by the constraining community" (225). He does not mention, however, that Arnholm is also the mover and the agent of the transformation of Bolette's life. Taken the previous analysis into account, we can read the subplot, as a parallel, but in the sense that Bolette is going to live Ellida's other choice, the one that remained unfulfilled. Her story is a more realistic and arguably milder alternative of the life Ellida could have had with the Stranger.[81]

In the end, I would like to come full circle and finish with the play's beginning. After Ellida's appearance and Lyngstrand's subsequent mistake, it is discovered that Bolette and Hilde lie about the reason for the celebration. Namely, even though they state that it is for

[80] Des Roches finds a similar connection between Hilde's words that Arnholm is scaring away the fish in the pond with the fear Ellida carries of the Stranger (1987, 312-313). However, she, like Hemmer and Haugan, sees these parallels into an ironic relationship. The question of irony for her is important because "it lies at the heart of this particular play" (315).

[81] What I attempt here is first and foremost a close reading of Ibsen's text in its final version. I shy away from referring to earlier drafts and sketches. However, I would like to make a few exceptions and mention one of the changes that Ibsen made in the text. Interestingly, in the first sketches of the play, Arnholm was named "the strange passenger" (*den fremmede passagér*), whereas the Stranger's name at that time was "the young seaman" (*den unge sømand*). I shall indicate another of Ibsen's notes from his preliminary drafts in the thesis' conclusion. For more on the evolution of the text and the characters, see Appendix I in *The Oxford Ibsen* (1966). For the original, see Utkast in *Hundreårsutgave* (1999).

Arnholm's re-visit, Bolette is secretly arranging a birthday commemoration. I have shown that her mother must have been deceased for about eight years, which suggests that her death happened not so long after Arnholm's departure. On her birthday, he returns. Interestingly, we come to see that Bolette's words to Ballested prove strikingly true in the end – strangers do come and with the flag and all the flowers she is unconsciously organizing not so much a birthday commemoration as a celebration in honor Arnholm's arrival and her subsequent engagement, which will happen in the following two days. Therefore, this opening is rather prophetic; it functions as a foreshadowing of Ellida's future re-encounter with the Stranger, and yet at the same time can be taken at a face value.

10 CONCLUSION

Each of us is alone on the heart of the earth
pierced by a ray of sun:
and suddenly it's evening.

Salvatore Quasimodo[82]

Ibsen's plays have been accorded the reputation of being "relentless" as an object of interpretation. In this citation, David Rosengarten touches on many points that I have also underscored in my analysis:

> the would-be interpreter (...) must contend with carefully constructed ambiguities, subtle shifts in the author's point of view, and an annoying sense of always seeming to be on the verge of interpretative synthesis without ever arriving at it. (...) Ibsen's plays rarely lull us into soporific recognition of certainties. (1977, 463)

In my view, *The Lady from the Sea* reaffirms this status. The subplot, like its main female protagonist Bolette, is permeated with unyielding paradoxes. An obvious predicament is how to approach and integrate each of these differing and perplexing moments found in the play, especially when they seem self-obliterating in the sense of undermining and contradicting a socio-critical gendered analysis of the same dramatic narrative. On the other hand, the intertwinement of the social critique with the personal/emotional aspects of Bolette's story renders this text exceptionally intricate, and demonstrates that its author is a keen observer of the nuances embedded within nineteenth-century society, with human beings as factors and agents in it. As I have argued throughout, the feeling of identification with the middle-class ideology for some women, as well as the need for self-acknowledgement and liberation for others, delivers a picture of unresolved opposition in the late nineteenth-century bourgeois woman. Women seem, in many instances, simultaneously subjugated and fierce supporters of their class' unwritten codes. In the same fashion, subscribing to a victimizing reading of Bolette is problematic, given her feelings for the alleged master. Can liberation, as Beauvoir and other feminists articulated the concept, be expected from someone who loves her "oppressor"? Her embarking on a "transgressive" marriage with a person whom she considers one ought not to marry makes one wonder whether to interpret Bolette as an ordinary defender of her class ideology, or a scandalous sinner against her inner moral code. Nonetheless, if one does not opt to read this marriage as a business deal in overall, as I have,

[82] From *Complete Poems*, introduced and translated by Jack Bevan (London: Anvil Press Poetry 1983), 29.

one is still left with the impression that even a progressive intelligent woman needs a man-savior in order to realize her dreams. A conclusion of this sort is in accordance with the following insight into girl's fixation with a man:

> In a more or less disguised way, her youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for Man.
>
> Surely the adolescent boy also dreams of woman, he desires her; but she will never be more than one element in his life: she does not encapsulate his destiny; from childhood, the little girl, whether wishing to realize herself as woman or overcome the limits of her femininity, has awaited the male for accomplishment and escape; he has the dazzling face of Perseus or Saint George; he is the liberator; he is also rich and powerful, he holds the keys to happiness, he is Prince Charming. (Beauvoir 2010, 341)

The only difference here is that Bolette does not wait for anyone, yet she embraces a commonplace story in which the Man appears as a Savior or as a God- / Deus ex machina -figure, the one who holds the answers and offers solutions. Bolette's feelings include a fear of a forfeited existence; but with Arnholm's offer, she is given a new *life*: "So I'm really going to have a chance to live. I had begun to fear that life was passing me by" (111). From that condition of stasis and death she is revived by misunderstanding. Thus, when Arnholm asks her if she is willing "to entrust [her]self and [her] entire future to [his] hands" (ibid.), we read the most lucid expression of the worldview that men are needed (and expected) to grant women their future, to direct, organize and take charge of their spouses' lives. They are the necessary external force, the impulse required to set in motion actions and awaken each woman's life.

In summary, I read this subplot both as an interweaving of a harsh critique of the nineteenth-century marriage practice, and a sunny yet unsettling happy end, something that I have gone to relatively great lengths elaborating in my analysis.

The scenes of the play's final act have baffled critics who generally embrace one of the two major interpretative positions: either it must be a highly ironical conclusion, since Ibsen would never write an optimistic story, or the playwright wrote a happy-ending rarity and hence one of his weakest and shallowest works. I, on the other hand, have sought to interpret *even* the subplot as resolving in a positive light, in spite of the strong textual criticism that does not spare anyone. This analysis and the above summary of the discussed thematic problems in the subplot of *The Lady from the Sea* represents, however, the sunlit tip of the iceberg, whereas the unsettling submerged foundation appears as hinted occasionally throughout the play. I am referring to the conversations on evolution with which I shall conclude.

The cumbersome deterministic basis of this play is first hinted at in Act III, when Ellida reveals her belief that people are not meant to settle on dry land: "if only man had learnt to live on the sea from the very first… Perhaps even in the sea… We might have developed better than we have, and differently. Better and happier" (74). This view is not rendered as a mere fantasy of a neurotic; strikingly, many of the characters (implicitly) agree with it. Bolette, resigned and dissatisfied, confirms that they seem destined to endure their fate on shore; Wangel also considered it possible, as Ellida claims. Eventually Arnholm acknowledges that this might be the case. The missed opportunity to develop life at sea/in the sea connotes, however, a loss of the true human nature – not only for the inhabitants of the seaside towns and communities, but for all of mankind. We have strayed from our own environment, where we belonged. In the sea, we would have been able to live *differently* from the way we live on Earth, we would have been able to live *happier*. From this perspective, the loss of the place of belonging is a loss of *joy* of which human beings "suspect" and "bear with it as with some secret sorrow" (75). Deep down lies the fathomless root of human melancholy; the presentiment that human kind took "the wrong track" from where there is no return to the right one. Arnholm remarks that people do not appear to be so sad, that they seem in fact to live "happy and pleasant lives… quietly, serenely, joyfully" (ibid.), but Ellida interprets this joyful surface as one experienced during the summer months with their bright sunny days, before the impending threat of the long dark days becomes real and tangible (ibid.). Furthermore, this feeling of lost happiness triggers a persistent yearning: Ellida's longing for the sea ("Night and day, winter and summer, this relentless undertow – this homesickness for the sea" (59)) and for the implacable pull of the unknown lost path, described as "black soundless wings" overcoming her (120); Bolette's to learn and go away;[83] Wangel's to reconstruct and relive the lost harmony he experienced with his deceased wife.[84]

The ending only enhances the significance of this excruciating subtext. Act V evolves on a dusky summer night with Ellida and Wangel awaiting the Stranger's return. They deliver few lines - somewhat tinged with sadness - about the last voyage of the steamer, the imminent

[83] On two occasions we are given a longing imagery of her standing and looking in the distance as the steamers leave the fjord. See page 83 and 123.

[84] Ibsen has not come very far from his original notes, though: "Life is apparently a happy, easy, and lively thing up there in the shadow of the mountains (…). Then the suggestion is thrown up that this kind of life is a life of shadows. No initiative; no fight for liberty. Only longings and desires. This is how life is lived in the brief light summer. And afterwards—into the darkness. Then longings are roused for the life of the great world outside. But what would be gained from that? With changed surroundings and with one's mind developed, there is an increase in one's cravings and longings and desires. A man or a woman who has reached the top desires and secrets of the future, a share in the life of the future and communications with distant planets. Everywhere limitations. From this comes melancholy like a subdued song of mourning over the whole of human existence and all the activities of men. One bright summer day with a great darkness thereafter—that is all.— Has human evolution taken the wrong path? Why have we come to belong to the dry land?" (Appendix in *OI*, 449).

closing of the sea-ways and subsequent long dark days. Ballested detects the undertones of their commentaries: "Melancholy thought. For weeks and months now, we have been the happy children of summer. It will be hard to come to terms with the dark days" (107). This remark proves true, unless one masters the art of dealing with it by acclimatizing. Therefore, even though Wangel elucidates Ellida's obsession as being idiosyncratic behavior of the sea people, who, in his view, constitute a separate race of humanity; yet she proves merely an apparent hard case of a person maladjusted to the anticipated gloominess. What differentiates her from the others is that they have become better acclimatized and more skillful in coping with the inevitable dark nights.

The melancholic existence is linked with the twilight colors of the winter's daylight and with the sheer darkness of the nights.[85] When Arnholm proposes to Bolette, he offers her, among other things, to "Share in all the things you sit here dreaming about. Lead a sunnier life" (110); therefore, not just the sea, but the sun and the light function as metaphores for the primordial home as a place of happiness and fulfillment.[86] However, for humankind this light remains elusive; even the tourists headed towards the midnight sun are not better off, inasmuch as they belong to humanity. From this viewpoint, for every choice one makes, one will eventually have to come to grips with the long nights of human existence. What is truly peculiar is that these tones of the play's finale do not imply an imminent wrong choice on Bolette's or Ellida's part. Bolette might be perfectly satisfied with her studies and happy with Arnholm in the beginning; however, longing as a constant threat will not leave her at peace.

Put in these terms, Arnholm's line that it will matter little for the carp whether they continue to swim in the pond or they move to the waters of the fjords, assumes other more pessimistic, albeit liberating, connotations. If our genuine place is lost, the whole world suddenly becomes one great carp pond. It will not make any difference which environment we swim, as humans are beyond repair due to the ingrained evolutionary flaw of lurking sadness, longing, and dissatisfaction, arising from our taking the wrong path long ago.[87] Moreover, his remark with a smile "But what's done is done. We've taken the wrong track and become creatures of the land instead of the sea, and that's that!" (75), bears resemblance

[85] Interestingly, in Dante's *Purgatory,* the general atmosphere is permeated with dusky colors of sunsets and melancholy.

[86] Hilde's observation that Ellida and her father look like a newly engaged couple, seems perfectly logical to Ballested, since, as he states, "It's summer-time", i.e. the season of happiness (123).

[87] This is rendered obvious in Ellida's very contradictory statements. In spite of her complaints that she does not have roots in Wangel's house/home or that she should not have married him (something which she becomes aware of upon the Stranger's arrival), the main reason for her dissatisfaction remains rather vague. Ellida cannot specify what exactly is wrong in her marriage with Wangel before the reappearance of the Stranger. On the contrary, she acknowledges on couple of occasions that she was given everything (99) and that she came to care for him deeply (50). Her pleas to Wangel to protect her and save her *from herself* (my emphasis, 83) and her later recognition that she does not want to fight the longing within (102, 108), further corroborate this perception.

to the philosophical emphasis on the attitude a person adopts in view of disadvantaging contexts and situations. His line, thus, becomes the guiding principle for humankind, and the only constructive outlook one can assume.

The five acts in *The Lady from the Sea* and the protagonists' choices take place in summertime; I have analyzed the actions of the subplot keeping that fact in mind. On sunlit days human beings reestablish lost contacts and communication; love, study and travel; obtain freedom, responsibility, and voice in their marriages; and most importantly, gather their strength to fight the darkness of an unrelenting winter in themselves.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(Some personal notes on ideals, relevance, and the butterfly effect)

> REBECCA. Take up the struggle again, John. If you really try—you'll see, you'll win. You'll ennoble souls by the hundreds—and thousands. But you must try!
>
> ROSMER. Oh, Rebecca—when I've lost faith in my own life work?
>
> REBECCA. But your work already has proved itself. You've ennobled one person at last—me, for as long as I live.[88]

With every rereading of Ibsen's works, I cannot escape the disquieting impression of him being a deeply disappointed and unhappy person. His plays abound in defeated male protagonists. They are either tortured by a profound self-doubt and guilt or endure a feeling of a forfeited life. It seems that when he is not determined to kill them off by the end of the play, he is mercilessly mocking their failed ideals and hopes in their life's mission. Reading his (early) letters in which he passionately writes about the humanity's and society's rebirth and transformation and relating them to his plays, one feels that his texts are an odd sort of rubbing salt into his own wounds. However, it is not just the male protagonist who suffers; his family and "the woman who loves him" will have to be sacrificed so that he can achieve victory (ibid., 579-580). Presumably one of the strongest characters in Ibsen's opus, the aforementioned female fanatic is willing to avail herself of extreme measures to give Rosmer an external validation that (his) ideals were not in vain. During the past year I have also heard individuals who work within the wider Ibsen field, express similarly disturbing opinions. In a popular German production, loosely paraphrased, one of Stockmann's lines states that theaters do not have any power in saving humanity or changing the society (a line that was additionally inserted in the script, not exactly Ibsen's choice). Almost three months later, a professor gave an interesting presentation of some of Ibsen's theater stagings abroad. Asked about the playwright's impact in her home country, she replied with a disappointment in her voice that it was almost none. Nothing significantly changed in her culture, regardless of the adaptations and translations.

[88] From *The Complete Major Prose Plays* (1978), 581.

Elaine Hollingsworth – the first person to whom I owe my sincere gratitude – is the reason for this long and perhaps strange introduction. She is neither a member of my family nor a professor. She is a former actress and a healthcare activist. To this day, I do not know what made me read her book *Take Control of Your Health and Escape the Sickness Industry*. I was never drawn to medicine – biology was one of my least favorite subjects in school, and more of the health issues covered in her book affected middle-aged people. At the time, I was in my early- to mid-twenties. I had finished my studies in Italian and Spanish Language and Literature and was considering continuing my education somewhere in Spain. Her work, that had opened a whole new world for me, led to a two-year extensive reading of integrative medicine, alternative research, and the (mal)practice of the medical establishment.

Some years later, looking for master's programs in Europe, I came across the Ibsen Studies. My first thoughts were whether I actually wanted to spend two years studying and writing about gender. However, knowing a few works of an author, does not give one a clear and precise picture of his entire oeuvre. Thus, between work and other activities, I decided to check the libraries in my home town and (re)read him. My first stop was the local library in my neighborhood. The librarian managed to fetch me an old Serbian edition of Ibsen, but it was not *A Doll's House* or *Hedda Gabler*, as I had expected; it was *An Enemy of the People*.[89] I finished the book the same day with the thought "this is my writer" lingering in my mind. It was a weird feeling. It felt like being in a room full of strangers, and yet among the crowd of unknown people, you spot and recognize someone who is your type of person. By the time I finished *Brand*, I was checking the list of documentation required for my application. A year after, instead of Santiago de Compostela, I ended up at the Ibsen Centre.

It can be hard to say how people react to books, theater productions or documentaries. So what if the seas did not part, the sky did not open, or the world was not shaken to its foundations? I do not know how many people after reading Hollingsworth's book walk the lanes in the supermarkets meticulously scrutinizing the products' ingredients and contents. But I know *I* do. I do not know how many people become aware about animal cruelty after watching *Earthlings*. But at least *I* became a vegetarian. Nor how many people become enlightened after reading some of Ibsen's plays. Words and ideas touch people across space and time and they will matter greatly to someone someday.

I cannot help but notice the efforts individuals make to restore Ibsen's allegedly lost or declined relevance in the playwright's own home country. From my point of view, the

[89] The library Braka Miladinovci is located at ten minutes walking distance from my home in Skopje. The address is: Виа Егнација, Ѓорче Петров, 1060 Скопје, Македонија (Via Egnatia, Gjorce Petrov, 1060 Skopje, Macedonia).

problem is how to make them less relevant. I'm not referring only to *An Enemy of the People*. I implore you to do your own experiment. Start talking with people and try to get to know them better. Listen carefully to what they are saying about their lives and you will realize that at least one third of them have Ellida's feeling of non-belonging; that they feel like unconnected misunderstood misfits. I am not sure how obsolete the discussion on keeping quiet about one's thoughts so that the society's truly influential people who hold the power will not get agitated (*Ghosts*, ibid., 216). A similar point is repeated in Kroll's words to Rosmer: "believe and trust in anything you want, for God's sake-anything. But keep your beliefs to yourself," so that the tradition "upheld by the best of the society" (ibid., 532) can remain untouched. The conformism in the *Lady from the Sea*, which I analyzed in this thesis, proves as strong as ever in the present society as well, in spite of all the changes regarding female emancipation. Or just ponder upon Ibsen's most vividly brutal description of building success upon other people's misery:

> But I can tell you what this luck feels like. It feels as if a big piece of skin has been stripped, right here, from my chest. And the helpers and servers go on flaying the skin off other people to patch *my* wound. But the wound never heals—never! Oh, if you knew how sometimes it leeches and burns. (ibid., 831)

One encounters milder versions of Solness's story on every corner.

I could continue this list, but the point is that I have never shared their concerns about his contemporary relevance. In the beginning, my interest in Ibsen was of a very different kind. I thought that I came to Oslo to write about mysticism in his plays. However, *Brand* or *Emperor and Galilean* as a subject matter for a thesis seemed like a huge undertaking. Therefore, I made the decision to write about free will in *John Gabriel Borkman*. And then the opposite fear arose. For that reason, I added *The Lady from the Sea* as a second play for my thesis. I spent the first year writing long notes, sketches and papers on Ellida's story. I was not aware how much work the subplot required until I started writing. What in the beginning was intended as short one-two chapters, turned into the present analysis. From Brand and Borkman, I ended up writing about Bolette.

When I first read the play back home, for some reason, the subplot seemed to me incredibly Dickensian. At the time I did not know the story of Adda Ravnkilde, a young female author who committed suicide. Ibsen, according to Joan Templeton, knew her case, and her work in which she depicted obsessive relationships and longing to see the great distant world (1999, 194-195). One could only guess that he was motivated to give somebody a happy ending in fiction, when it is impossible in real life, as exemplified by the fictional

author within Ian McEwan's *Atonement.* As for the actual story, the only thing a reader knows about their past is that Bolette was infatuated, while Arnholm considered her name ugly. Years afterwards, he returns strained, he is willing to move (expensive) mountains for her and give her *his* (sur)name. Underneath the social critique, this subplot struck me as a strangely beautiful sort of poetic justice, or a story in the be-careful-what-you-wish-for style.

In regard to the present thesis, first I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who has written on Ibsen's plays and on *The Lady from the Sea* in particular. My two-year almost incessant reading of their analyses proved of immense help for the development of my ideas as put forth in the thesis. Whether I agree or disagree with their conclusions it does not matter. They wrote on Ibsen; they are my people.

The final version of the draft has been proofread by two fellow students, Brendan McCall and Elizabeth Lindemann. I thank both of them for their positive feedback; Brendan, for his encouragement of my topic, and Beth, for her kind and competent assistance in readjusting some of my imperfect sentences.

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Psychologically, it is far from easy to make the first attempts at academic writing while being supervised by someone who, already in his late twenties, did far deeper analysis than many experienced critics could ever do. It feels like whatever one writes is simply not going to be good enough. Although I do not refer to it, and he never specifically recommended me to read it, the central chapters of the thesis have been to some extent influenced by Professor Frode Helland's conference paper "Ideology and Hegemony in *Ghosts*" (2007). The writing of this thesis proves that what one person does at the present moment can have future resonance in completely unintended ways. Along with Ibsen scholarship, his work has been incredibly important to my textual analysis. I doubt that this text would have turned out so detailed and multileveled, if he had never done his elaborate and exhaustive study of *The Master Builder* (2000). Notwithstanding his personal views on the existence of free will in human beings who are "all *of* culture," that is precisely the importance of individuals who obliterate "*janteloven*" mentality and of Ibsen's allegedly utopic "door-slamming." I am thankful for his guidance and ability to deal with my occasional bouts of southern *culture* and temper. I am proud to have this thesis supervised by him.

My final and deepest gratitude goes to some special people in my life. I feel much obliged to my parents and to Andrijana Ilievska, a friend and a soulmate, for always seeing the best in me, particularly in times when I myself could not see any of it.

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